Contents

Chapter A
The economic and social environment of education

1. About Hungary

The Republic of Hungary is situated in Central Europe, with a population (1996) of 10,212,000. Its territory covers 93,000 square kilometres, which is about one per cent of Europe. 12.6% of the population live in towns, and 18.7% in the capital city of Budapest. Hungary is a fairly homogenous country in its ethnic composition: 96% of the population are Hungarian, who speak the Hungarian language (this language is fairly unique in the region, as it belongs to the Finno-Ugrian language family). The major groups of national minorities are the following: Germans, Slovakians, Serbs, Croatians, and Slovenians. The biggest ethnic minority is the Romani, or Gypsy, whose number is estimated to be some half a million. The number of Hungarians living in a diaspora abroad is about 5 million, of whom some 2.5 million live as an ethnic minority in neighbouring countries, mainly in Romania and in Slovakia. Similar to the other post-communist countries a religious revival can be witnessed in Hungary since the change of the political regime in 1989/90, but it is difficult to estimate the number of religious people. One guideline in making a rough estimate of this number is that in their income tax declarations for 1997 citizens could contribute one per cent of their tax to the denomination of their choice. 11% of the 4.5 million tax payers (about half a million citizens) decided to do so for 55 different churches or denominations. The Catholic Church was supported by the biggest number (about 62%), followed by the Calvinist Church with 18%. This data, however, has to be treated with caution as the taxpayers do not include those not in direct employment, who constitute the majority of the population.

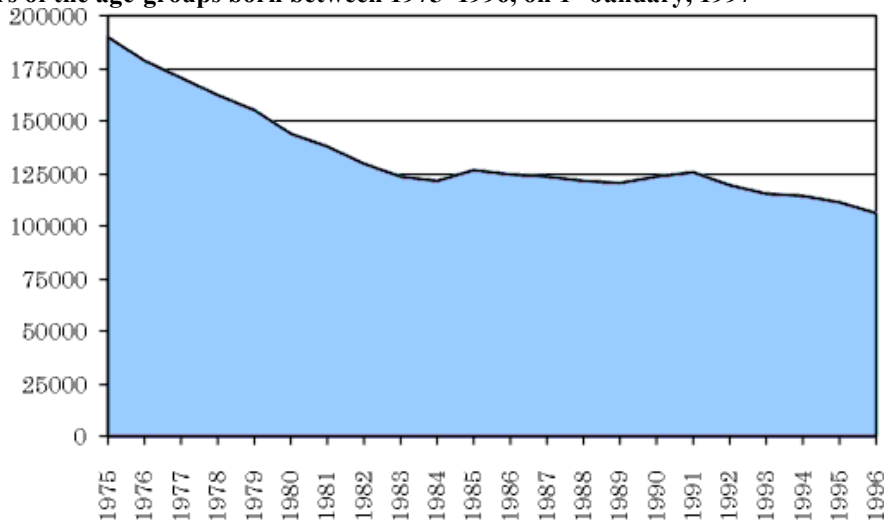
Hungary is a parliamentary democracy with a one-chamber Parliament. The system of political parties has been in constant transformation ever since the one-party political system was abolished. Following the first democratic elections after the change of the regime in 1990 a conservative government coalition was formed with a Christian-democratic orientation, led by the Forum of Hungarian Democrats. The elections of 1994 produced a victory for the Hungarian Socialist Party, which formed a socialist-liberal coalition when coming to power. After the elections of 1998 a centre-right government was formed by the Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Party. The power

of the President of the Republic in this system is fairly limited. The Constitutional Court has been an important player on the political scene since the change of the regime.

The population has been in decline since the 1980s, Hungary is an ageing country. The ageing index (the proportion of people over 60 as compared to the less than 15-year-old) has grown from 54.3 in1960 to 108.1 by 1996. In 1960 one quarter of the population (25.4%) were under 15, and only 13.8% were over 60. However, by 1996 the number of the old exceeded the number of the young (the proportions were 19.4% and 18.0%). The main reason for this can be found in the decline in the birthrate. The number of births reached its peak in 1975, then decreased radically until 1984 when it stabilised around 120,000. At the beginning of the 1990s the birth rate started to decline again and the rate of decline has increased rapidly ever since. While there were 124,000 live births in 1990, there were 114,000 in 1994, and only 106,000 births were registered in 1996. (For the changes in the numbers born between 1975 and 1996 see *Figure 1*.)

The reasons for the unfavourable data in demography and in the health conditions of the population may partly be sought among the dramatic social, economic and political changes that have occurred in Hungary in the 20th century or at least in the past decade. The country entered the 20th century as part of a middle-size European empire (The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy) and lived through not only the two world wars (like the rest of Europe) but, as a consequence of the wars, it lost some two-thirds of its population and territory, and witnessed a change in the political regime on eight occasions. The last of these, the 1989/90 upheaval in world politics and the collapse of the Soviet empire, have brought about changes (transition from a monolithic political structure to a parliamentary democracy, and from a Soviet-type planned economy to a market economy) that are considered by analysts both abroad and in Hungary to be favourable, opening up new, promising horizons for the country. Yet, for the majority of the population, they often entail difficult changes and choices.

Figure 1
The numbers of the age-groups born between 1975–1996, on 1st January, 1997



Source: Statistical Yearbook of Hungary, 1995, and the data of the Central Statistical Office
Note: The 1996 data is a rounded estimate

2. Economic situation, educational expenditure

The Hungarian economy started the transformation into a market economy with *a fairly mixed legacy* at the turn of the last decade. As compared to the other countries in a similar situation our circumstances could be perceived as being more *advantageous*: due to a process of reforms and to the former economic policy, Hungary had advanced much further in winding up the shortage-economy than the rest of the countries of the Soviet bloc. It was also an advantage compared to the rest of these countries that people in Hungary had relatively wider and longer experiences with markets and enterprises. The transition was helped by the presence of an educated, well-trained labour force, although this is a characteristic which holds true for the other Visegrád countries (for example the Czech Republic and Poland). The level of education had been gradually improving, even though almost half of the population still did not have more than the eight-year general school as the highest educational qualification in 1996. (*See Table 1*.) The most radical improvement may be perceived among wage earners: in 1996 four-fifth of them had an educational qualification higher than the eighth-grade general school while the corresponding proportion in 1990 was roughly two-thirds (*see Table 2*). The level of educational qualifications among wage earners has improved so dramatically due also to the workforce with the lowest qualifications having been forced out of the labour market, i.e. they have retired or become unemployed (*see* this in more detail *later*).

Table 1
The Hungarian population aged 15 and over according to their highest educational qualification, 1960–1996 (%)

	general school			completed			total
	grade 0	grades 1-7	grade 8	technical school and trade school	upper secondary school	higher education	
1960	3.3	63.8	24.3	–	6.2	2.3	100.0
1970	2.0	46.6	31.1	5.5	11.1	3.7	100.0
1980	1.1	32.8	32.8	11.0	16.5	5.8	100.0
1990	2.1	20.7	35.6	15.0	18.7	8.8	100.0
1996	0.8	14.0	33.5	18.9	22.7	10.1	100.0

Source: Szukicsné, 1993; Microcensus, 1996.

Note: For school types see Chapter C/1.

Table 2
Active earner population by level of highest educational qualification, 1960–1996 (%)

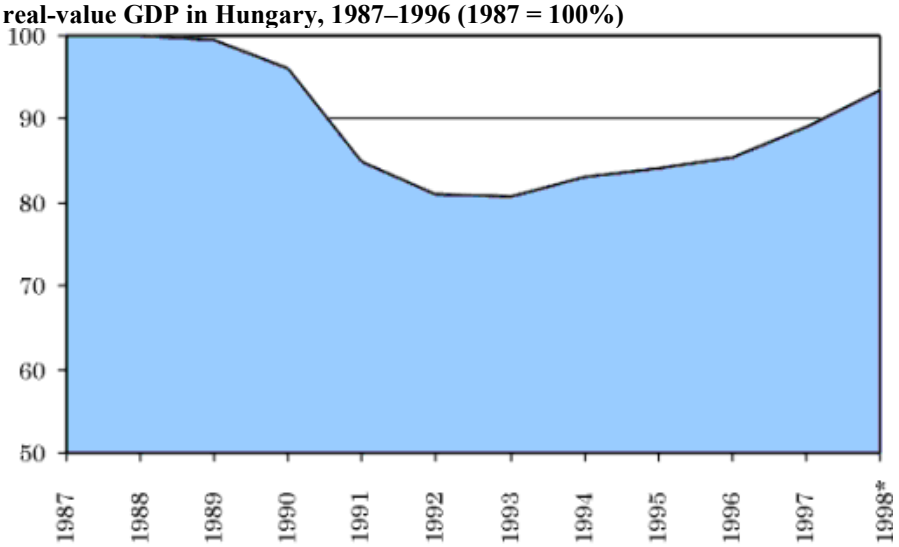
	general school		completed			total
	grades 0-7	grade 8	technical school and trade school	upper secondary school	higher education	
1960	64.9	24.7	–	7.2	3.2	100.0
1970	39.0	34.1	7.8	13.9	5.2	100.0
1980	18.5	35.4	16.9	21.1	8.1	100.0
1990	5.2	33.4	24.2	24.8	12.3	100.0
1996	1.1	20.2	30.6	31.3	16.8	100.0

Source: Szukicsné, 1993; Microcensus, 1996.

The change in the *gross domestic product* is one of the most important macro-economic indicators, which clearly illustrates the general state of the economy (*see Figure 2*). The initial decline in the GDP is a general characteristic of the transitional period in Eastern Europe. Growth picked up slowly after 1993, and the annual growth rate moved into the 1-2% bracket. Yet still only 85.1% of the 1987 GDP was

produced in 1996. After a growth rate of 4.4% in 1997, a similar rate of growth – 4.5% – is forecast for 1998.

Figure 2
Changes of real-value GDP in Hungary, 1987–1996 (1987 = 100%)



Source: Hungarian Statistical Yearbooks, 1988-97, Central Statistical Office

* Forecast.

Transformation of the ownership structure. Hungary in the 1990s can be characterised by a far-reaching transformation of the economic infrastructure (the infrastructure of a market economy is being gradually created) and a large number of changes are taking place at the micro-level as well. Of the latter the privatisation of the state properties and the mushrooming of the new enterprises – i.e. the changes in the ownership structure – have been the most significant. As a result of these processes the Hungarian economy, where formerly state ownership prevailed, has gradually been transformed into a market economy where private ownership dominates. (*See Table 3*.)

Table 3
Double accountancy companies (excluding the fiscal sector) by the added value produced and by ownership sub-category*, 1992–1995 (%)

	1992	1993	1994	1995
added value				
public/state	55.7	41.9	34.8	27.1
domestic, private	34.5	41.7	44.6	48.0
foreign	9.8	16.4	20.6	24.8

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Hungary and Pocketbook of Hungarian Statistics, 1992-1996.

* The ownership sub-category is defined by the type of the majority owner.

By the mid-1990s the number of companies with majority public ownership gradually diminished. By 1994 these companies employed only slightly less than one-third of the labour force and produced a little more than 30% of the added value. The number and the added value of the majority foreign owned companies increased considerably. By 1996 it was these companies that produced some one-fourth of the added value (and their high productivity is revealed by the fact that they employ only 14.5% of the labour force). They are having an important impact on the growth of exports and they play a major role in the transmission of a technological and production culture that contributes to the modernisation of the economy and to the dissemination of market economy principles and behaviour. Since the beginning of the transitory period the traditional institutions of a market economy (capital market, stock exchange, two-tier banking system, etc.) have also come into being and have become more and more active.

The state of public finances. By 1994 the deficit in the total government expenditure amounted to a dangerous 8.4% of the GDP. In 1995, the government responded to this with the *Bokros Package*, named after the then minister of finance, which introduced severe restrictions in fiscal policy. The package contained measures both for the raising of state revenues and for cuts in spending. The planned saving measures in social welfare spending were either rejected by the Constitutional Court or did not result in significant saving. On the other hand, the measures concerning the numbers and real salaries of public employees were carried through and had a severe impact on teachers, the largest group of public employees (*see also Chapter E, which*

deals with the school personnel). Nevertheless, due to the stabilisation of 1995 the government managed to keep the public deficit at a controllable level in 1995 (6.4%) and to push it down to around 3% by 1996. These processes, however, strongly affected government expenditure as a whole.

Concerning educational expenditure as a proportion of GDP, it can be said to have exhibited some stability up to 1994. Since then, however, there has been a proportional decline (*see Table 4 and Chapter B on the administration and financing of education, and on educational policy).*

Table 4
Government outlays as a percentage of nominal GDP, 1990–1996 (functional breakdown)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996*
Total expenditure	63.0	64.9	61.4	61.1	64.0	57.8	54.3
of which:							
General administration	2.5	2.6	3.3	3.3	3.7	3.2	3.2
Defence	1.6	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.0	1.1
Public order and safety	4.3	7.0	6.0	9.8	9.5	7.0	7.9
Education	*5.6*	*6.4*	*5.8*	*6.9*	*7.5*	*6.5*	*6.0*
Culture, religion	1.4	1.6	1.9	2.3	2.2	1.8	1.5
Health care	5.8	6.8	7.8	6.8	7.1	6.2	5.2
Social insurance (pensions)	15.2	18.3	18.8	19.0	17.4	15.1	13.4

Source: Lelkes, 1997.

* expected data

3. The re-structuring of the labour market, unemployment, youth unemployment

The economic activity of the population has undergone significant re-structuring since the end of the 1980s. The most important element of these changes is the dramatic decline in economic activity. The number of people in employment decreased by almost one and a half million between 1990 and 1996 (*see Table 5*). While in 1990 some 88% of the population of working age were employed, this rate sank below 62% by 1996. The unemployment rate was 11.7% in 1996. Yet the

majority of those who lost their jobs did not become unemployed but left the labour market (e.g. took early retirement with the help of one of the early retirement schemes). As a consequence, the number of dependants soared: while there were 98 dependants per 100 employed, the corresponding rate of dependants rose to 173 by 1996, a growth of 76.5%.

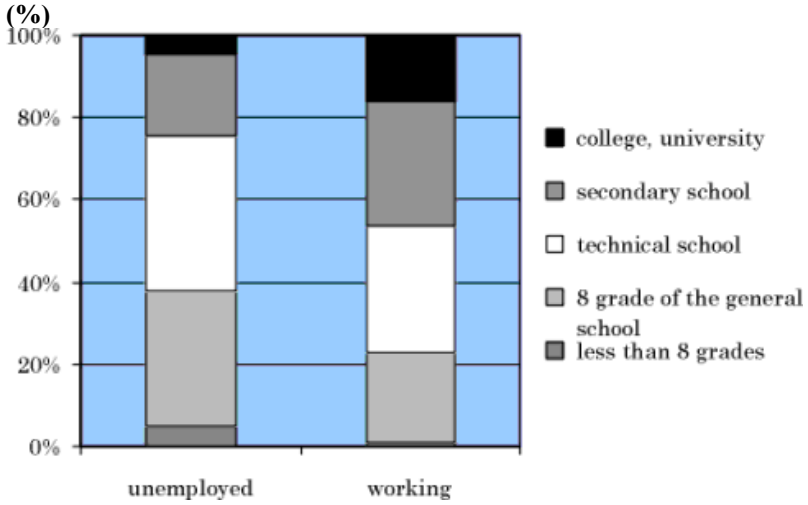
Table 5
Population and economic activity. Data from the beginning of the calendar years 1990–1996 (thousand people)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
total population	10 375	10 355	10 337	10 310	10 277	10 246	10212
working age population	5 957	5 997	6 032	6 057	6 071	6 082	6 081
in employment	5 227	5 052	4 534	4 090	3 881	3 793	3 744
unemployed	24	101	406	663	632	520	496
economically active	5 251	5 153	4 940	4 753	4 513	4 313	4 240
economically inactive	5 124	5 202	5 397	5 557	5 764	5 933	5 972
dependants	5 148	5 303	5 803	6 220	6 396	6 453	6 468
number of dependants per 100 employed	98	105	128	152	165	170	173

Source: Pocketbook of Hungarian Statistics, '96.

The characteristic features of unemployment. Since the beginning of the mid-1980s the labour market positions of individuals have been increasingly determined by the educational qualifications possessed. Higher and secondary educational qualifications have been valued more and more while the value of a general school or a technical school qualification has greatly diminished. This process has only intensified since the change of regime. The relative earning positions of those with a higher qualification have improved, their chance to become unemployed is much lower than of those who have lower levels of schooling. People with only an eighth-grade general school certificate or lower are being driven out of the labour market for good. While in 1996 the rate of those who had at most a general school certificate was 38% among the unemployed, the rate of the same group among those in employment was 23%. At the other end of the scale the rate of unemployment among those with a university or college degree is only 4.4%, and among the employed they number 16% (*see Figure 3*).

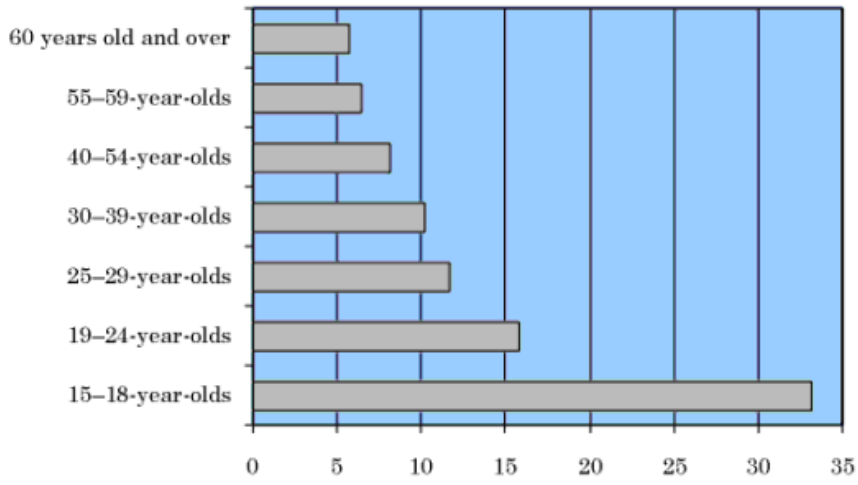
Figure 3
Breakdown of working and unemployed population by highest educational qualification, first quarter of 1996 (%)



Source: Monthly Statistical Bulletin, Central Statistical Office.

It is another characteristic feature of unemployment in Hungary that the proportion of the *long-term unemployed* (those out of a job for more than a year) is high by international comparison. The number of unemployed looking for a job for more than a year rose from 19% to 50% between 1992 and 1996. Three-quarters of the long-term unemployed have an educational qualification lower than secondary, that is a qualification from the general school or from a technical or trade school for skilled workers. In the past few years the labour market chances of the very young and the older generation have deteriorated while there have not been significant changes among the middle-aged (*see Figure 4*).

Figure 4
Unemployment rates by age group, 1996 (%)



Source: Monthly Statistical Bulletin, Central Statistical Office.

Some of the unemployed are at the beginning of their working career. Those with a technical school certificate for skilled workers are the most numerous, though their proportion is decreasing. (For the types of schools *see Chapter C on the education system*).

4. Processes in society

Inequalities in incomes. The expansion of market conditions and the economic crisis that unfolded after the change in the regime have resulted in significant changes in the income distribution of the population and in the development of income inequalities. In 1988 the average income of the top ten per cent calculated by the per capita income in the household was 5.8 times more than that of the lowest. In two years this rose to 6 and has been rising ever since. By 1996 the richest had an average income 7.5 times bigger than the poorest. This growths is mainly due to the fact that the incomes of people in the upper 10 per cent have grown faster, while the majority of the society have grown poorer since the change of the regime.

Poverty threatens those families most where the number of dependants is high, or where one of the earners becomes unemployed. It is not only the occupation but – to a growing extent these days – the type of educational qualification as well, that will determine the relative poverty or wealth of the workers concerned. In 1992 the

probability of becoming poor for university graduates was half as much as for the average, and four years later a degree definitely provided a shield against poverty. The proportion of the poor among those with a secondary school leaving certificate decreased a little in the examined period: in 1992 12% of those with a secondary school leaving certificate belonged to the poorer strata of society, while in 1996, the figure was only 9%. The number of the poor among skilled workers is close to the national average, while one quarter of the unskilled remain poor.

Looking at poverty *by settlement type,* we can perceive the gap widening between the capital (Budapest) and the rest of the country. Since 1992 the number of the poor in Budapest has decreased significantly (from 13.3% to 5.3%) while the rest of the settlement types have kept their former relative position: the likelihood of facing poverty in the counties is lower than the average, poverty among small town-dwellers is about the national average, and between one-quarter and one-third of the people living in villages belong to the poorest. The inhabitants of the North-Eastern region are the poorest: almost every third person living in this region can be perceived as being poor (*see Table 6*).

Table 6
The rate of the poor in various demographic categories, 1992–1996 (%)

Demographic categories	People with per capita income belonging to the lowest 20% of incomes	
	1992	1996
Type of settlement		
Budapest	13.3	5.3
county seat	16.6	19.2
Town	20.1	19.4
Village	27.1	28.1
Region*		
Budapest	13.3	5.3
Trans-Danubia/West	14.5	17.1
The Great Hungarian Plain	21.5	29.1
North-East of Hungary	31.9	35.0

Age		
0–2	40.1	42.4
3–6	42.9	37.7
7–14	33.7	32.7
15–19	29.8	30.4

Source: Andorka-Spéder, 1997.

* Calculated by Matild Sági.

There are some peculiar correlations between *poverty* and the *size of the family* or the number of children in the family. About the size of the Hungarian families in general: more than one-third (1,114,000) of all households (3,870,000) in 1996 comprised one person (of whom 70% were retired persons). There are no children in one-third of the families, there is one child in another third, and there are more than one children in the last third (data of the 1996 micro-census). The number of children per 100 families is 109. The number of children per 100 families is the highest (112) in the families where all the adults are unemployed: more than double the average number of children live in such families. Nevertheless only 4% of all children are raised in families like this since the number of such families is low (2% of all families).

There are almost 6 times as many children living in the poorest 20% of households, compared to in the richest 20%. The more school-age children live in a household, the poorer the household is likely to be. The situation is similar in the case of children attending a technical or a trade school: relatively five times as many technical or trade school students live in the poorest households as opposed to the richest ones. Children of better-off households tend to carry on with their studies in secondary schools. This tendency is reversed with students in higher education: there are relatively three times as many students from the richest households attending higher education than from the poorest ones. As far as spending on education is concerned, the richest 20% of households with dependent children tend to spend 4.5 times as much on the schooling of their children as the poorest households (*see Table 7*).

Table 7
Breakdown of households with dependent children, by 5 income categories

			Quintiles*			
		2.				
per 100 households						
child at general school	62	38	4	6	1	
child at technical or trade school	10	7				
child at secondary school	12	13	1			
child in higher education	2	2				
Breakdown of general school pupils (%)	41	25	6	1		
Breakdown of technical and trade school pupils (%)	36	25	8	4		
Breakdown of secondary school students (%)	23	25	1	5	5	
Breakdown of students in higher education (%)	13	13	3	0	0	
Per capita educational expenditure in households with dependent children (HUF/year)**	1430	2110	740	720	150	

Source: Calculated by András Sugár, 1997, based on the household statistics of the 1996 Microcensus.

* Column 1 stands for the poorest 20%.

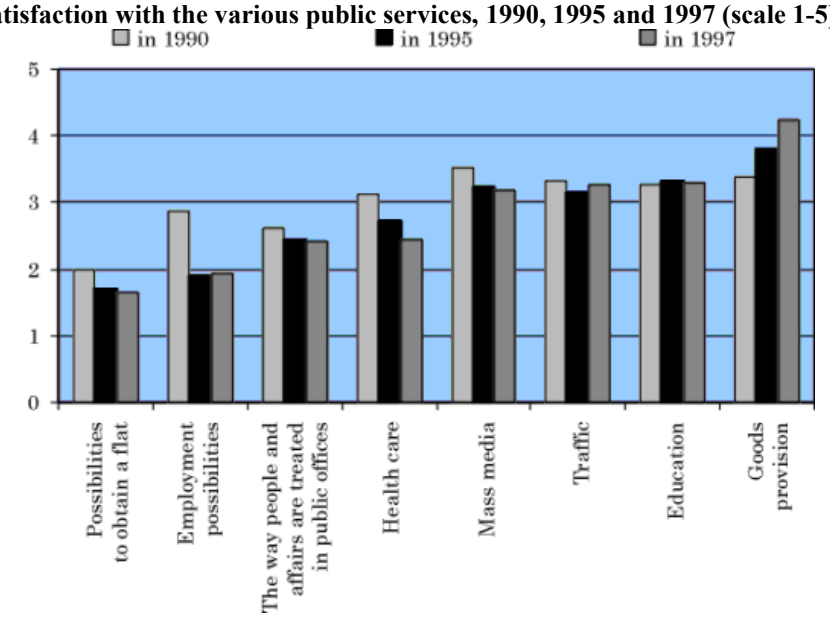
** The educational expenditures listed in the household statistics include the following: textbooks, stationary articles, school fees.

5. Public opinion on education

Education is becoming a field people are more and more satisfied with. The negative opinions that are formed by those experiencing the internal crisis and the adaptation difficulties of the education system *from within* do not characterise society at large. According to most public opinion polls on education the majority of the Hungarian population are more or less satisfied with the educational services. A survey in spring 1997 showed that 9% consider the quality of education poor and a further 2% consider it very poor. The same survey places education the second when rating consumer satisfaction with the various public services, and this indicates a

positive shift: education used to be the fourth in the satisfaction rating in 1990 but came second after the provision with goods in 1995 and 1997 (*see Figure 5*). The reason for this change is not only the actual rise in satisfaction with education but is also due to the fact that satisfaction with other public services has declined.

Figure 5
The level of satisfaction with the various public services, 1990, 1995 and 1997 (scale 1-5)*



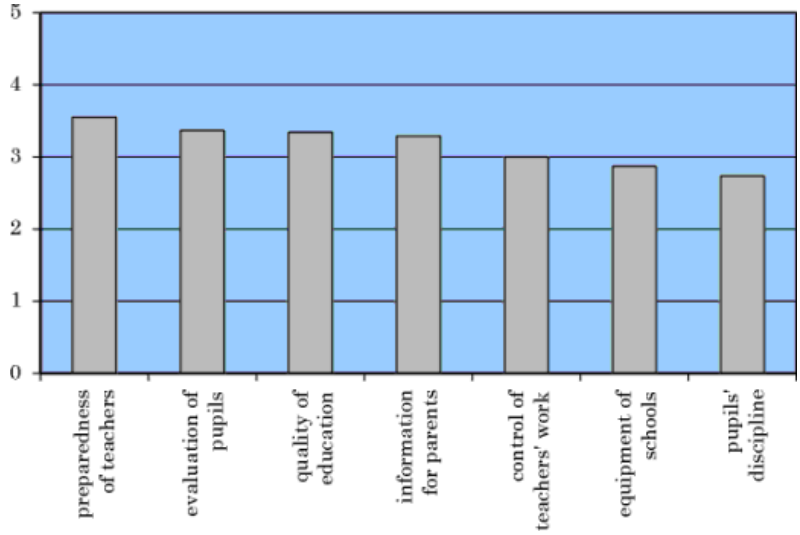
Source: OKI – Szocio-Reflex Kft. 1990 and 1995; OKI – Marketing Centrum, May 1997.

* 1=least satisfied.

Yet people are not satisfied, to the same extent, with the various areas of education. While, for example, they esteem the preparedness of teachers highly, they are much less satisfied with pupil discipline, with the equipment of schools, and with the way the work of teachers is assessed (*see Figure 6*).

Figure 6

Public opinion on certain characteristics of schools, 1997 (scale 1-5)

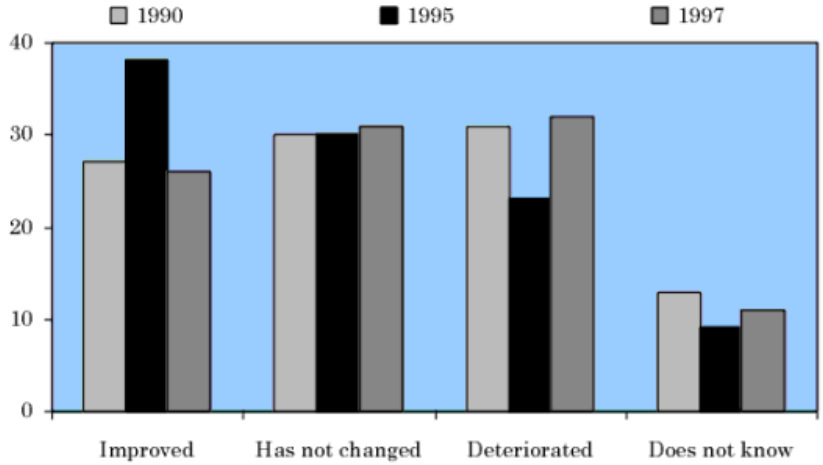


Source: OKI – Marketing Centrum, May 1997. The question asked: "How satisfactory do you find the following in Hungarian schools?"

In a 5-grade scale the population gave more than 3 to the quality of education, but it must be pointed out that the number of people holding a negative opinion of the quality of education has grown in the past few years. While in 1995 only 6% of those asked said that the quality of education was poor or very poor, their proportion rose to 11% by 1997. When asked how the quality of education has changed in the past ten years a smaller proportion of adults said in 1995 as opposed to 1990 that it had deteriorated or deteriorated badly. However, by 1997 the number of those who perceived the changes of the past period as negative rose again to the former level, and the number of those uncertain rose as well (*see Figure 7*). It should be added here that the questions asked in public opinion polls usually refer to the whole of the education system and not only to school education, and those surveyed do not necessarily distinguish between education and school education.

Figure 7

"How has the quality of education changed in the past ten years?" Breakdown of answers (%), 1990, 1995, 1997



Source: Szabó, 1997.

It must also be pointed out that the satisfaction rankings usually reveal more about the demands of people than about the things they form an opinion of. Satisfaction with school education and assessing the importance of this field is often not independent of their social position: better qualified people and town-dwellers usually consider education more important, and are more satisfied with it, than the less qualified and villagers. The opinion formed on the work of teachers also depends on the type of location where those surveyed live: even though teachers are best qualified in the capital the opinion formed about them is the least favourable here. It is also worth pointing out that people living in villages have a worse opinion on teachers work than people in country towns. It should be noted furthermore, that people under 30 do not find education as important as the middle-aged generations.

Chapter B
Educational policy, the administration and financing of education

1. The trends and values formulated in educational policy in 1996-97

Hungarian school education at the beginning of the 1990s could be described as having two main features: *crisis* and *adaptation*. Nowadays we have to add a third one: *stabilisation*. The crisis and the ensuing need to adapt were brought about by the dramatic transformation in external conditions, such as economic recession, the deficit in public finance, and the consequent austerity measures. The harshest effects of the economic crisis hit the public institutions, and among them especially the schools, at a later date. One of the major causes of this timelag lies in the decentralisation of educational administration (*see in more detail below*), since up to 1995 the local communities were able to compensate for the decrease in central support and provide a kind of safety net for the institutions. After that year, however, they were no longer able to do so.

The crisis in school education provoked by the fiscal restrictions were amplified by the parallel change in another important external condition, in demography. Though the demographic decline reached its lowest point by the middle of this decade the decline has continued – if not to that extent and not that fast – and will probably continue in the future as well.

School education went through its most difficult years from the point of view of fiscal restrictions in 1995 and 1996. This was a period of school closures, discontinuation of former services, dismissals of teachers, and of local conflicts revolving around these events. It was in 1995 that the formerly unbroken trend in which public education received a growing share of the gross domestic product was halted and, for the first time, the growth rate of the support for education sank below the officially published rate of inflation. In 1995 and 1996 the real value of teacher salaries decreased to an unprecedented extent. These were the years of teachers leaving the profession, entering re-training programmes to turn them into insurance

agents or tax officials, or, last but not least, – becoming entrepreneurs. But one of the major worries of Hungarian school education, namely that too many teachers, and not well-paid teachers, work in schools, was not solved in this period either.

It is worth mentioning here that the cutbacks and the ensuing social tensions were stronger in higher education than in public education. It was in higher education that one of the most opposed measures, the levying of fees, was carried through and it was in this sector that the reduction of staff met with the strongest opposition on the part of employees.[1] There was a significant difference in cutback policies between higher education and school education, and in the responses to these policies by society. While in higher education the government was both the agent of the restrictive policies and the target of the opposition in public education the tensions – due to the decentralisation of school ownership – mostly appeared at the local level.

The transformation of the economic environment has had a peculiar impact on vocational education. The state-owned large industrial plants used to provide the background for the vocational education of skilled workers, which enrolled a vast majority of the 14-year-olds. These plants have disappeared for good from the Hungarian economy. Their place has been taken over partly by companies with foreign capital interests and partly by small and middle-size enterprises, which are able, or willing, to employ vocational students in much smaller numbers. Furthermore, the proportion of economic sectors and employment areas that require white collar workers and a better qualified work force has increased.

By 1996 a bigger role was being played by the private sector of the economy with regard to producing the gross national product. Even though many of the subsidiaries of multinational companies, especially in the export-oriented sector, often seek a less qualified workforce the privatised economy in general has become more demanding. Better qualifications mean greater chances in this sphere. This, however, does not usually result from a higher esteem for traditional forms of schooling but rather the appreciation of those competencies and attitudes that are required for successful adaptation to the demands of the workplace. These competencies include reliability, good rapport with colleagues, knowledge of foreign languages, skills for independent learning, willingness to move to a new profession, and skills in handling the modern tools of information and telecommunication technologies.

As far as *the political context* is concerned we can say that by the mid-1990s the institutions of democracy were formed and had stabilised. However, signs of stabilisation were closely tied up with signs of crisis and adaptation. This statement is particularly valid for the relations of administration and financing since *the system of local governmental administration* and *of local financing* started to stabilise exactly in this period of crisis and adaptation. The concrete contents and the varied practice in exercising local governmental responsibility were clarified and developed in most areas of the country in this period of rationalisation. The ability of decentralised authority to crisis manage and adapt was clearly demonstrated here.

The transition taking place in Hungarian school education is usually perceived as a *reform process* by foreign analyst even though the word reform is not heard within the country. In Hungary, alienation from the concept of reform can be explained by the legacy of the state socialist system, which regularly launched new reforms but was not able to – and did not even aspire to – win the approval of the general or the professional public. The current processes, however, are different in character. The decentralisation of administrative power excludes the possibility that the governmental centre initiate overall reform for all elements of the system. A reform today can only mean the co-ordinated support and the strengthening of the local initiatives, of the local and institutional level, and of innovations at various points in the system. Stabilisation thus does not mean the disruption of changes. On the contrary, it means *the stabilisation of the reform process*.

Legislation and education policy debates

In accordance with the 1993 Public Education Act in 1995 the government adopted the most important document of content regulation in force today, the National Core Curriculum (*see in more detail in Chapter D on curricula, examinations and pupil attainments)*[2]. Right after this the Parliament passed those amendments to the Public Education Act which were seen by the socialist-liberal government as the most urgent[3]. The changes contained the most important measures that were needed for the introduction of the National Core Curriculum and some restrictions to slow down the vertical changes of the school structure. Furthermore, they abolished the Regional Educational Centres (the organs of regional professional administration).

The overall amendment of the 1993 Public Education Act was carried out in 1996[4]. The number of the amendments was so high that a lot of people thought a new act had been adopted. Yet the Amendment can only be considered a further development of the 1993 Act. The new elements included in the Public Education Act (new norms for the provision of tasks at the local level, more detailed regulations of the assessment and examination systems, the responsibility of regional planning being allocated to the county level, and the widening of student rights) easily fit into the former structure of the Act.

During the preparation of the new legislation there were a number of *debates* going on in the narrower professional circles and in the wider political context, which indicated that there were significant differences in opinion in society and in the teaching profession concerning the transformation of the public education system and its future development. These differences in opinion mostly appeared over the reform of content regulation. The debate was most heated about the reform of the school leaving examination, where one of the underlying issues was the future of the traditional general secondary school, the gymnasium (*see in more detail in Chapter D on curricula, examinations and pupil attainments).* There was huge controversy over the intention of the Ministry of Culture and Education to make the choice of the subject of history optional at the school leaving examination. This was fiercely criticised by a section of the general public, leading to the declaration by the Minister of Education that the compulsory examination in history could not be abolished. The plan to introduce the dual-level school leaving examination was the other main target of criticism. There was no compromise reached on this issue. The 1996 Amendment to the Public Education ruled that the students could decide in which of their subjects they wanted to be examined in at the general level, and which at the advanced level. The Regulations of the School Leaving Examinations, which were adopted by the government in 1997[5] and will be introduced gradually until 2004, make it the students right to choose the level of examination subject by subject.

The other debate concerned the intended rise in the *compulsory number of lessons to be taught by teachers*. Among other things with which the government tried to force the school maintainers and the schools to revise the number of teaching positions, and reduce it where justified, was the intention to raise the number of compulsory lessons, which were low by international comparison. The publicity given

to this intention mobilised the teachers trade unions but the school maintainers (mostly the local governments) insisted that the rise should take place. The number of compulsory lessons was actually raised by the Amendment of the Public Education Act but the measure affected only certain groups of teachers and its extent was much smaller than formerly planned.

There was much less controversy about the other item of the Amendment that directly concerned teachers: the regulations about *in-service training and the specialised examinations being made compulsory,* though these were among the most significant changes initiated by the amendment. They are significant not only because they directly influence the conditions of teaching but also because they have serious implications for the re-distribution of the resources meant for public education. They also introduce a new element of modernisation into educational policy. There was also little debate over another outstanding measure of the Amendment, which *extended compulsory schooling*. The reason for the relative lack of interest can be found in the ruling that it only affects those who enter primary school in 1998, i.e. the effects of this measure will only be felt a decade hence. By raising compulsory schooling from the age of 16 to 18 Hungary has joined those few European countries where compulsory schooling lasts more than 10 years.[6]

There were more debates about another point of the Amendment of the Public Education Act, *the widening of the circle of students rights*. These measures, on the one hand, meant the incorporation of some formerly adopted international agreements into Hungarian legislation, and, on the other hand, they laid down some completely new individual and collective student rights, especially the widening of the rights of students' self-governing bodies. So, for example, the students – through their delegates in the school board – can now exercise their right to form an opinion about the general questions of the school's pedagogical programme. This liberal approach to student rights raised some opposition from those who are concerned about the maintenance of school discipline and about the undermining of traditional authority.

The liberal inclination of the ministry proposing the Amendment is reflected even more strongly in another item of the regulations, in the handling of *the freedom of schooling* and *private education*. As opposed to the former regulations according to which private maintainers could only receive state support if they made an agreement

with the local government or with the state, the new regulations grant normative state support for all private institutions which are registered and operate lawfully.

Budgetary debates

The budget of 1996 can be considered to be of outstanding significance as it contained a number of public educational issues of strategic importance. For example, it was the 1996 Budgetary Act[7] that decided that there would be no direct financing of salaries by the state, as was a likely prospect under the 1993 Public Education Act. This ruling implied that one of the biggest issues of educational policy in the 1990s, the reduction of the school capacities and the teaching staff made superfluous by the decline in pupil numbers, was not going to be solved by the central government directly, or by the centralisation of the right to decide on the allocation of resources: the central government left the task of coming up with local solutions in this respect to the local governments. In principle, the questions could have been raised as to whether there really was superfluous capacity and whether teachers should be dispensed with. But the answers to these questions were given earlier and outside the sphere of public education. Through the budgets adopted at the end of 1993 and 1994, including freezing the normative grants to public education, the "message was sent" to the local governments that the central policy did not wish to finance surplus capacity. The efficiency indicators of Hungarian public education, especially the relative salary expenditure per pupil, became so favourable by international comparison by the beginning of the 1990s due to the decline in pupil numbers that it prevented the viability of any educational policy that would have aimed at the preservation of the surplus capacity. With the adoption of the budget of 1996, however, the educational policy makers expressed their intention to channel a part of the resources – formerly used for the financing of the superfluous capacity – into the financing of development.

It was the 1996 Budgetary Act that first contained a support system that matched the National Core Curriculum. In this Act normative financing was made to serve the realisation of the government-level strategic objectives much better. The approach was that influencing the local adaptation processes could be best achieved by making the maintainers financially interested, and the number of supplementary normatives that served the strategic objectives was consequently raised. Rather than being

earmarked the central grants meant for salary rises were built into the normatives, motivating the maintainers to replace the characteristic and automatic base-financing with active financial management of personnel. The local governments were compelled to create the resources themselves for the pay-rises by reducing personnel but were allowed to take loans – with central budgetary security – to cover the temporary expenditure increases (e.g. severance payments for those dismissed).

In 1997, following the amendment of the legislation of the year before, the government released substantial resources for the support of development in the field of educational contents. Most of these resources were allocated to the schools, where they could be used for personnel expenditure on content development and in-service training. The Amendment connected certain elements of in-service training with pay-rises. The overall settlement of teacher salaries has however remained the biggest unsolved problem of the period.

The 1996 Amendment of the Public Education marked a new definition of the responsibility of the state for public education: the state can guarantee and influence educational provision first of all *by determining the general rules* of local educational provision as exactly as possible and *by motivating* the local decision makers.

One of the key slogans of the central educational administration operating between 1994 and 1998 was *modernisation* but, independently of the individual administrative sectors, modernisation as a political objective characterised the whole of the socialist-liberal government coalition. The educational policy marked by the adoption of the National Core Curriculum represented modernisation in the contents of education, namely the broad-term reform of content regulation, the development of the system of assessment and the system of quality assurance, and the support of professional competencies, and of the professionalisation of teachers. Addresses given by the Minister of Education on various occasions in 1996 and 1997 emphasised the importance of the expansion of secondary education and of the contents reform, and formulated two modernisation objectives. One of them was the development of education in information technologies and the connecting of schools to the global telecommunication networks, and the other was the development of an in-service training system that would ensure constant development of the professional competencies of teachers and in so doing would realise the objective of *life-long*

learning within the teaching profession. These modernisation objectives were approved by the 1996 Amendment of the Public Education Act.

2. Decentralised maintainer administration and county level planning

General characteristics of the administration of public education. There are two major features that are characteristic of the administration of public education in Hungary: one is its *integration with public administration*, the other is the system of *shared responsibilities*. Integration means that public educational administration is not separated from the general system of public administration, or local governmental administration, at the local and regional levels. There are no local or regional administrative organs directly subordinated to the central government. The responsibilities for the tasks of public educational administration at the local and the regional levels lie with the elected bodies of the local governments and with the notaries, who are in charge of general public administration. Within the local governmental offices there are usually no separate organisational units responsible for the administration of public education. Integration is expressed by the system of financing public education as well: it is part of the general financing system of local public services.

The administration of public education can be characterised by shared responsibilities both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, the responsibility for public education is shared between several governmental organs. Vertically, responsibility is shared between the central governmental organs, the regional governments, the local (settlement) governments and the institutions of public education. These levels all possess independent administrative rights which limit the rights of the others but which presuppose their active co-operation.

Administrative levels and functions. When analysing the administrative system of public education we can differentiate between the *levels* of administration and the administrative *functions*. There are fours levels of public educational administration in Hungary: (a) the central or governmental level, (b) the regional or county level, (c) the local or settlement level, and (d) the institutional level. Such a four-level administration system characterises many of the education systems of the developed

countries. It is a special feature of the education system in Hungary that there are significant decision-making competencies allocated to the local and institutional levels while the regional level has the smallest influence. In the allocation of the decision-making powers there is hardly any difference between the different (primary and secondary) levels of education.

Concerning the administrative functions there are three major groups: (a) political, interest-negotiation or consultative functions, (b) governmental, administrative or authority functions, and (c) professional functions. These functions lead to agents (organisations, institutions, bodies) with different administrative functions. *Table 1* shows the agents of the administration system of Hungarian public education.

Table 1
The administration system of Hungarian school education

	Political, interest-negotiation and consultative functions	Governmental, administrative and control functions	Professional functions
National level	Parliament; The Parliamentary Committee of Education, Science, Youth and Sport; National Public Educational Council; Educational Policy Council	Ministry of Culture and Education (Ministry of Education since summer 1998) other sectoral ministries	national professional services, research and development institutes (OKI, OI, OKSZI, NSZI)*
Regional level	County governments and their educational committees, county organs of regional development and educational planning	head notary, the educational departments of the county governments	public educational institutions of regional functions, maintained by the counties, county pedagogical and service institutes
Local level	local governments and their educational committees	notary the mayor's office at the settlement	pedagogical service institutions of the settlement
Institutional level	school board	school head	teaching staff

Note: In reality the functions cannot always be separated clearly. (E.g. At the institutional level the school head also fulfils professional functions, or, the teaching staff have some functions of interest-negotiation and administration as well.)

[*] OKI: Országos Közoktatási Intézet (National Institute of Public Education)

OI: Oktatáskutató Intézet (Institute of Educational Research)

OKSZI: Országos Közoktatási Szolgáltató Iroda (National Institute of Public Educational Services)

NSZI: Nemzeti Szakképzési Intézet (National Institute of Vocational Education)

A direct dependency relation between the various levels and actors is very rare in the administration system of Hungarian public education. A characteristic feature of this system is that there are autonomies which complement and restrict one another. There are no relations of subordination or supremacy whatsoever among the various organs with political interest or negotiation and consultative functions. Among the agents with governmental, administrative or authority functions it is only between the local (regional) level and the institutions maintained by it that we can talk of a direct subordination or supremacy. There is such a relationship between a local governmental school and its maintainer but it is a limited one because of the legal regulations that guarantee the autonomy of the institutions. There are no administrative organs operating at the local and regional levels that are directly subordinated to the central governmental organs. As a result of this, on the one hand, interest-negotiation and partnerships become more appreciated, and on the other hand, *court rulings* play an increasing role. The rulings passed by the *Constitutional Court* are of outstanding importance as they exercise an increasing influence on public policies, and within these, on public educational policies. In the past few years the Constitutional Court has dealt with educational matters on 14 occasions, out of which 7 affected public education directly.

Responsibility for provision, institution maintenance. Providing public education in Hungary is the task of the local communities, that is, of their organs of power, the local governments. One of the salient features of our system of public educational administration is that the responsibility for educational provision does not mean the obligation to maintain an educational institution. The local governments can freely decide in what way they ensure the provision of public educational services: they can maintain their own institution or can make an agreement with another maintainer.

Another feature of public educational administration is that the allocation of the obligation for educational provision to certain administrative levels is not exclusive or does not lead to one levels monopoly. While, for example, providing secondary education is the task of the counties, towns or villages also have the right to maintain a secondary school. Up till recently the local governments in their decisions on whether to maintain an educational institution were only influenced by economic considerations, i.e. if a local government considered the foundation of a school financially feasible there was nothing to prevent it from doing so. Since 1997, however, the local governments have to take into account the county developmental plans (*in more detail later*).

The vast majority of public educational institutions in Hungary are *the property* of the local or the county governments. The decisive role that the local governments play in the administration of public education is not only the consequence of the important administrative rights allocated to them but also of their role as the owners of educational institutions. In the past few years the number of local governments among the school maintainers has somewhat decreased to the advantage of the county governments, and the number of private and church school maintainers has also risen (*see Table 2)*

Table 2
Changes in the number of schools maintained by the various maintainers, 1993/94–1996/97

	general school		secondary school		together	
Maintainer	1993/94	1996/97	1993/94	1996/97	1993/94	1996/97
Local government	3574	3470	605	591	4179	4061
County government	49	60	172	216	221	276
Central budgetary organ	30	30	24	38	54	68
Denomination	94	145	42	63	136	208
Foundation, private individual	21	56	19	65	40	121
Other	3	4	5	7	8	11
Total	3771	3765	866	980	4637	4745

Source: Ministry of Education, educational statistics.

Central administration

The responsibility for public education within central government is exercised by the Minister of Education (Minister of Culture and Education until summer 1998). The Minister used to supervise the area of culture besides public and higher education. In the new governmental structure the area of culture is administered by the Ministry of National Cultural Heritage.

The direct supervision of school education is carried out by a deputy secretary of state. The size of the personnel responsible for public educational matters is fairly small in international comparison, which is due to the broad responsibilities allocated to the local and regional levels. The increase in the tasks of the Minister brought about by the changes in the legislation has not resulted in the growth of the ministerial personnel so their number is very small, as are their responsibilities. The successful administration of the field of public education presupposes that the responsible deputy secretary co-operate with the deputy secretaries responsible for higher education, for international relations and for finance. Within the Ministry the political secretary, who is responsible for the representation of the Ministry in the Parliament, also deals with public education as one of his general tasks and on some special occasions of interest, as does the administrative secretary of the Ministry, who is responsible for the internal organisational matters of the Ministry and for the inter-ministerial relations.

The Public Education Act determines three main types of the Ministers responsibilities for public education: (a) direct administrative tasks, (b) regulatory tasks, and (c) developmental tasks. The 1996 Amendment of the Act broadened the responsibilities of the Minister of Education and assigned new tasks to him/her. There are new tasks, for example, concerning the in-service training of teachers and institutional heads, the preparation of the county developmental plans, the organisation of the students parliament, and the measurements and assessment tasks of public education.

It is an important feature of the central administration of public education that there are relatively few direct administrative tasks attached to the ministerial level but, at the same time, the number of regulatory and developmental tasks is very high. The extent of decentralisation in the Hungarian public education system is shown by the fact that the central administration can little interfere with the local and institutional

level processes directly. With the exception of the organisation of the examinations and on the occasion of an extraordinary event the Minister can exercise his/her responsibility only via indirect means and only with regard to the education system as a whole and not with the individual institutions. The way the legislation regulates the Ministers responsibilities practically enforces the Minister to fulfil the role of a strategic developer. The major indirect means the Minister can resort to are the motivation of developmental initiatives and the adoption of the general regulations that determine the operation of the institutions.

In the former administrative structure co-operation between the Ministry of Culture and Education and the Ministry of Labour was of outstanding importance since it was the latter that bore the responsibility for vocational education. Their co-operation can be exemplified by the new regulation of the school leaving examinations in 1997: while the formulation of the examination requirements and their submission to the central government was the responsibility of the education portfolio, the requirements for the vocational examination subjects were prepared under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour. A similar example is the operation of the committee which in 1996 – under the shared supervision of the two ministries – published the long-term labour market prognoses that, among other factors, have oriented public educational planning at the county level. The 1997 institutionalisation of the so-called short-cycle higher vocational education also happened with the co-operation of the two ministries. In the new administrative structure the responsibility for vocational education has been assigned to the Ministry of Education (while the Ministry of Labour has been abolished and its tasks re-allocated).

It is a special Hungarian feature that the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior carry out intensive co-operation in the field of public education. Since the administration of public education is integrated into the system of local governmental public administration, and since the state support for education is built into the general financing system of public administration, the Ministry of the Interior responsible for the local governmental system and for public administration inevitably plays an important role in the indirect administration of public education. The co-operation between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education is also of growing importance in the administration of public education.

The necessity for the various fields and ministries to co-operate explains why there are more and more occasions when it is not the ministry but the central government that makes a decision on an educational matter. Such matters have been the adoption of the National Core Curriculum and of the requirements of the school leaving examination, also the adoption of the higher educational training requirements (such as school management training) which have implications for public education as well, and the regulation of the whole system of in-service training.

Local and regional administration

Most decisions concerning public education in Hungary are made by *the local governments*. One of the decisive features of the Hungarian system of public educational administration is the large number of local authorities that maintain schools and – what goes with it – the smallness of the average size of these authorities. There were 3168 local governments operating in Hungary in 1997. 2400 of them maintained a public educational institution, out of which 1818 maintained a general school with at least eight grades. 74% of all local governments maintaining a school, and 55% of the local governments that maintained an at least 8-grade general school, operated in villages with fewer than 2000 inhabitants.

Irrespective of their size all 2400 local governments enjoy the same broad local administrative rights, which are laid down in the Public Education Act. This large number is unique in Europe. In comparison with some other decentralised systems which are built on the local governmental ownership of schools: the number of local governments with the right to maintain a school is 286 in Sweden, 439 in Norway, 440 in Finland, and 277 in Denmark. In the United Kingdom, which has a decentralised system as well, the county and the city district local governments are the local education authorities, and their number is 116 (*Structures of the Education..., 1995*). The local administration of public education in Hungary is very fragmented: the average size of the administrative authorities is small while their number is very high.

Due to the large numbers and to the small sizes the professional competencies needed for the fulfilment of the tasks of local public educational administration are hard to develop, or cannot be developed, by the majority of the local governments. In most cases the notary, who controls legality and fulfils administrative tasks, is the

only official with a higher educational qualification. An independent organisational unit to deal with the matters of public education does not always operate even within the local governments of towns. A vast majority of the decisions are passed directly by the elected bodies of representatives. These characteristics of administration are in accordance with the demands of a local democracy but they inevitably contribute to the growing inequalities between the areas. *(See also Chapter F on the strengths and weaknesses of the system.)*

Due to this situation, understandably, there is a growing attention paid to *the co-operation between the local governments*, to the associations. The central policy has tried to stimulate the associations by various means in the past period. In 1996 the regions that were willing to enter into associations received central support for school buses. There were grants earmarked in the same year for those founding an association to maintain a common school. The regions that entered into associations to ensure public educational provision were given normative support as well from the central budget. Besides this, the towns or villages that received pupils in their kindergartens or general schools from other settlements could apply for some additional support. The inconsistencies of these policies are revealed, however, by the fact that every village that maintained a school received a sizeable normative grant whether the conditions for association were present or not. This measure encouraged the settlements that would have otherwise been willing to enter into an association to organise their educational provision themselves. The willingness to associate is rather weak among the Hungarian settlements, which is clearly reflected even by the scarce data available. According to a survey in 1994 *(Közoktatási intézményhálózat, 1995)* out of 8056 institutions only 1028 fulfilled small-regional tasks, and only 373 of these (4%) within the framework of an association. Still, the associations in most cases only solve the basic difficulties with task provision and do not necessarily bring about significant changes in the professionalism and contents of local administration.

Among the conditions of decentralised administration local decisionmaking has an important influence on the efficiency of the public education system since the use of the resources at disposal basically depends on the local decisions. The years of 1995 and 1996 meant an extremely big challenge for the local administration of public education because, due to the demographic decline, the size of the central state support granted to the local governments for educational purposes decreased

considerably. The local governments were consequently forced to x-ray their public educational institutions and to deconstruct the superfluous or non-financeable capacities. This rationalisation at the middle of the 1990 was a painful process: it was at this time that the local governments took real possession of the public educational infrastructure which had been formally theirs since 1990 and started to behave as owners. The school maintainers only acquired a better knowledge of their network of institutions during this period of x-raying. Furthermore, the opposition of the local inhabitants that grew in many areas as a reaction to school closures and mergers did test the local communities.

The 1996 Amendment of the Public Education Act and the introduction of the National Core Curriculum have assigned new tasks for the school maintainers (mostly the local governments). They have to set up the financial framework within which the schools maintained and administered by them can develop their own *pedagogical programmes and local curricula.* Through the decisions made during these negotiations between the schools and the maintainers the maintainers can, in theory, set up new professional guidelines for the institutions, can re-structure their institutional system, and can re-define the scope of education provided at the settlement. These decisions determine how in the long run the public educational tasks are fulfilled and how the cause of public education is advanced in individual places. Their summation determines the same for the whole of the country.

In view of the demographic characteristics and the existing institutional structure, each settlement has to draw up their mid-term plans for the local organisation of educational provision. For this forecast they have to consider indicators such as the number of pupils, the number of school groups, the number of pupils per class (average and maximum numbers), the number of lessons to be taught, and, based on this data, they have to determine the optimum number of teachers employed. If these analyses lead to proposals to close, transform or merge institutions they have to examine the possible political implications of such moves. It is impossible to envisage today how local educational administration as a whole and the various groups of school maintainers will be able to meet the challenges arising from these decisions.

The past few years has seen the role of *the regional (county) level* gradually increasing as well. The 1990 Act on the Local Governments assigned the county

governments with rights similar to those of the local governments, so their actual regional responsibilities became very limited. The 1993 Act on Public Education allocated the rather soft rights of regional co-ordination to the county governments but it did not interpret this ruling more precisely. But with the 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act the county governments were allocated the responsibility of *the regional planning of public education*. The recent increase in the role played by the county governments is also due to the financial difficulties of the local governments, which made them hand over some of their secondary schools to the county governments.

In line with the ruling of the Public Education Act the county (and Budapest district) governments have to prepare – in co-operation with the local governments on their territory – a regional plan of educational provision, institutional operation and educational development. Though abiding by these plans is not compulsory, they cannot be ignored when certain decisions are made about educational development or re-organisation at the local levels. The county level administration can support the realisation of these plans, and of the regional organisation of educational provision in general, by financial means as well via the county public foundations, which were established following the 1996 Amendment, and which receive direct support from the central budget.

Administration at the institutional level

Autonomy at the institutional level is one of salient features of Hungarian educational administration. The biggest challenges to be faced by the independent educational institutions have been the decline in the number of children, the budgetary restrictions, and the preparation of the pedagogical programme of the institution, in line with the National Core Curriculum.

In trying to adapt to the decline in pupil numbers and to the fiscal restrictions, a conflict-laden process in all respects, the decisions made at the institutional level have played important roles. The majority of the decisions concerning rationalisation were made within the institutions. As in the Hungarian system the employer of the teachers is the school head, it was the head that had to decide what pedagogical programmes to terminate and which teachers to dismiss. The new situation did not only change the relationship between the institutions and their maintainers, it also affected the internal

relations within an institution and the relationship between the school head and the teaching staff. Before the Public Education Act was amended in 1996, the central guidelines did not offer much assistance to the management of the internal resources, so the internal and external bargaining processes did not take place in a regulated way. The new operational parameters determined by the Amendment (number of compulsory lessons, splitting study groups, etc.) have made the local and institutional bargaining processes somewhat more regulated, but they can still be neglected if the resources are available and local agreements are reached. The further adaptation to the new regulations (such as the rise in the compulsory lessons to be taught by teachers) will require institutional decisions that will inevitably bring about further conflicts of interest.

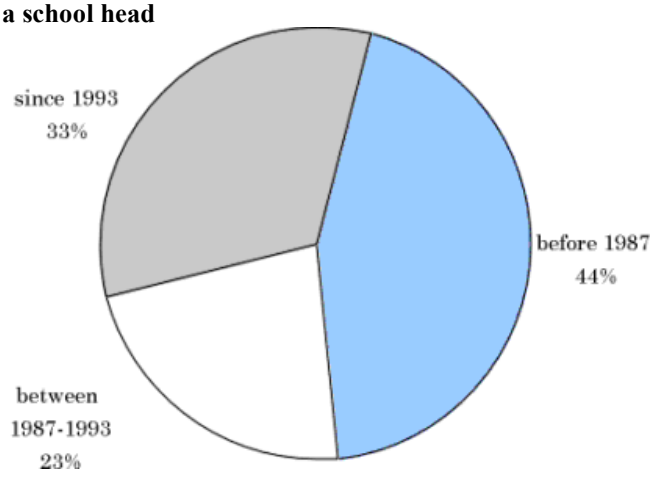
The elaboration of the school pedagogical programmes in line with the National Core Curriculum has meant a big challenge for the institutions, who have had to carry out internal (school level) and external negotiations (with the maintainer). It is an especially difficult task to adopt a timetable that determines the work load of the teachers and the internal division of labour. On the professional front, the institutions face the hard task of the elaboration of the pedagogical programmes and the preparation, or selection, of the local curricula and their adaptation to the specific school environment. To gain the approval of the local governments the schools have to defend the number of lessons they teach (so that they do not lose any of the former number), and they have to argue for the importance of the tasks they want to carry out beyond the compulsory ones, because the local governments undertake a long term commitment when they accept the conditions laid down in the local programmes and curricula.

The new tasks concerning the development of educational contents and the implementation of the National Core Curriculum have partly re-structured the responsibilities *within the teaching staff* as well. There is an observable tendency for the weight and importance of the common, staff-level decisions to grow as opposed to individual teacher decisions. Formerly, for example, it was the sole right of the individual teacher to select a textbook. Now, according to the amended legislation, the selected textbooks have to match the local curriculum adopted and the opinion of the teachers departments has to be asked for. The importance of common decisions can be expected to grow in connection with the in-service training of teachers, since the

decisions about the use of the grants earmarked for inset purposes will have to be made at the institutional level.

In education systems where institutional-level decisions carry a special weight *the quality of institutional level management* is of outstanding importance. The past few years have brought much more development in the training of school managers than formerly and spectacular advances have been made in the field of school management training and in-service training. Yet a number of experts argue that the field is still not given the amount of attention due, given its importance. Despite the reforms taking place in public education the influx of new people into the headmasters profession is relatively slow. According to a 1997 survey of school heads[8], two-thirds of the current postholders in public educational institutions were school heads already before 1993, and one-third of them took up the position between 1987 and 1993 (*see Figure 1*).

Figure 1
The year of becoming a school head



Source: Balázs, 1997.

Involving the social partners

In Hungarian public education, the consultative and interest-negotiation bodies, who aim to involve professional and social partners were established by the legislation of 1993. The number and the basic functions of these bodies have not changed in the last few years but their composition and concrete tasks have been thoroughly re-structured. Important new elements are the institutionalisation of

minority interests in the local minority governments and the surfacing of the demand for interest-negotiation at the regional level.

At the central level the *National Public Education Council* (*OKNT*) serves the involvement of the partners mostly interested in the content matters of public education (curricular regulation, textbooks, teaching aids, examination system, teacher in-service training). This body comprises of the teacher trade unions, the higher educational institutions of teacher education, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and – since 1996 – the immediate representatives of the Minister of Education. The *Public Educational Policy Council (KT*) is the body, besides the Minister of Education, which prepares, comments on, or proposes the public education policy decisions. The KT deals with all the matters of public education policy except for the legal status and the payment of public employees. Every major professional, social and governmental partner in public education that is organised at the national level is represented in this body: (a) the professional organisations of teachers, (b) the teacher trade unions, (c) the parents organisations, (d) the students organisations, (e) the local governments, (f) the minority governments, (g) the non-state, non-local governmental school maintainers, (h) the sectoral ministries involved in education and other national organs.

The *Interest-Reconciliation Council of Budgetary Institutions (KIÉT)* meets within the most important forum of interest negotiation, the InterestNegotiation Council, and deals with the financial issues of the state sector. In this council the government, the employers, the trade unions and the economic chambers represent the sides that carry out the negotiations of their interests concerning the legal status of public employees and their salaries. In autumn 1995 a separate interest negotiation body of the education sector, the *Interest-Reconciliation Council of Public Education (KÖÉT),* was established where the local governments are also represented among the employers.

In vocational education the tripartite[9] *National Training Council (OKT)* was established in 1991 and its most active period was in and before 1993, when the Act on Vocational Education was prepared. The 1996 Amendment of the Public Education Act abolished the OKT but parallelly created a new body, the *National Vocational Training Council (OSZT)* with five sides. The original tripartite set-up was

complemented with the representatives of the school maintainers (mostly the local governments) and the economic chambers. The OSZT is a body of commentary, counselling and decision preparation.

It is important to note that interest negotiation with the social partners is carried out not only at the national level but also at the *regional, local and institutional* levels.

3. Financing

The basic principles of the financing system

There are three basic principles in the financing system of Hungarian public education: (a) primary and secondary education is a local public service which has to be ensured by the local (regional) governments, (b) other actors (churches, foundations, associations and private individuals) can join in the provision and financing of education without any major restrictions, (c) the state, i.e. the central budget, provides the lawfully operating maintainers with a grant that can cover a significant proportion, or in certain cases the whole, of the expenses of the provision. (Even though private resources – the donations of individuals, families and private associations[10] – play an increasing role in the financing of education we are only going to deal with the public financing system in the following paragraphs.)

The financing system of public education has developed gradually and has got its current form in the past few years. The basic characteristics of this system have not changed since 1989 even though several of its important elements (such as the centrally set salary grades of teachers) came into effect later, in 1992. Two levels can be differentiated in the financing system of Hungarian education. One level is constituted by the budgetary connections between *the central state budget* and *the institutional maintainers*, the other by the budgetary connections *between the maintainers* and *their institutions*. The rules operating at these two levels are quite different from each other. While for the financial connections between the central state budget and the institutional maintainers the budgetary law prescribes a basically normative type of financing, the financial connections between the maintainers and their institutions are regulated to a much lesser extent. The latter can be characterised by the various combinations of base financing (the base is the budget of the previous

year) and budgetary bargains, which are based on the assessment of the needs and the means. Some elements of normative financing can appear at the local level as well but this can only follow from the local decisions. The most important characteristics of the financing mechanism of public education in Hungary can be summarised in the following:

- The two most important types of central support are the normative grants and the earmarked grants (target financing), of which the first is the determinant. The normative grants are automatically granted by the state budget if certain conditions are met. The local governments receive a variety of normative and earmarked grants, and the ones connected with education form just one group of the state grants.
- The normative grants for educational purposes are given to the maintainers in proportion with the educational services provided (first of all in proportion with the number of pupils). The normative grant is given to every maintainer that maintains a school with an official service permit.
- The school maintainers may have revenues from a variety of sources but the biggest proportion comes from the central budgetary support.
- The local governments are given the central grants without any restriction as to their actual use. They have the right to channel, or re-group, the central grants to any sector or task.
- The maintainers are free to establish the budget for their institutions. The only restriction is that the allocated budget has to cover the costs of the provision of the tasks that are laid down in the legislation.
- The basic rules of task provision that make the budgetary demands of the institutions calculable are regulated by law. Besides the public education and the vocational education acts the act on the legal status and the payments of public employees is of outstanding importance since the salary expenditures are the decisive items of the institutional budgets.
- Institutions (schools) with the right of autonomous financial management may have revenues other than the ones provided by the maintainer. If it does not hinder the school in the delivery of its basic tasks and if the maintainer gives its approval the schools may even enter into profit-oriented activities.

Resources and outlays

The outlays of the *central budget* for educational purposes, and among them the *normative grants* given to the local governments, are not necessarily spent on education at the local level. Thus, in the field of education, the central budget mainly expresses the *intentions* of the central government rather than finances the actual

fulfilment of the task. On the other hand, the local level may spend more, or may spend less, than the central grants on educational purposes. This is why in the Hungarian system of public financing we can gain a picture of the total educational expenditures if we examine the expenses of the central budget and the expenses of the local governments separately. We should also examine the expenditures at the institutional level as well but there are no data available to do so.

More than 95% of the *state grants* for education appear in the budget of the Ministry of the Interior as *normative grants* for the local governments. These grants amounted to *178 billion HUF* in the 1997 budgetary plan. The central support for some other local tasks in public education also appear here (e.g. the *earmarked grants* for teachers to buy professional literature, for professional developmental projects, for teachers specialised examinations and in-service training, and for the support of some regional or sub-regional tasks). A smaller proportion of the state support appears in the budget of the Ministry of Education. (According to the 1997 budgetary plan 5.6 billion HUF from the total budget of the Ministry served public educational purposes[11], such as the earmarked grants for the support of public educational developmental programmes and teacher inset programmes.) So the state support for public education in the budgetary year of 1997 amounted to a total of 184 billion HUF. (It is worth noting here that the budget of the local governments planned 295 billion HUF for the running costs of education.)

For the past few years, and especially after the amendment of the education act, the *grants earmarked* from the central state support of education have acquired a growing importance. These earmarked grants, as it has been mentioned, appear partly in the budget of the Ministry of Education and partly in the Ministry of the Interior. These grants do not in the main serve the continual operation of public education but target development, structural adaptation or the realisation of the topical priorities of the educational policy. The majority of these resources were also given to the maintainers in 1997 but – as opposed to the central normative grants – the maintainers had to hand over almost all of these grants to the institutions. Since the use of these grants is earmarked afterwards they have to be accounted for exactly. The maintainers can get hold of the earmarked grants via applications. The central government only examines whether the applicants are entitled to these grants or not. Once this is

established the applicants in the appropriate target group receive the support on a normative basis.

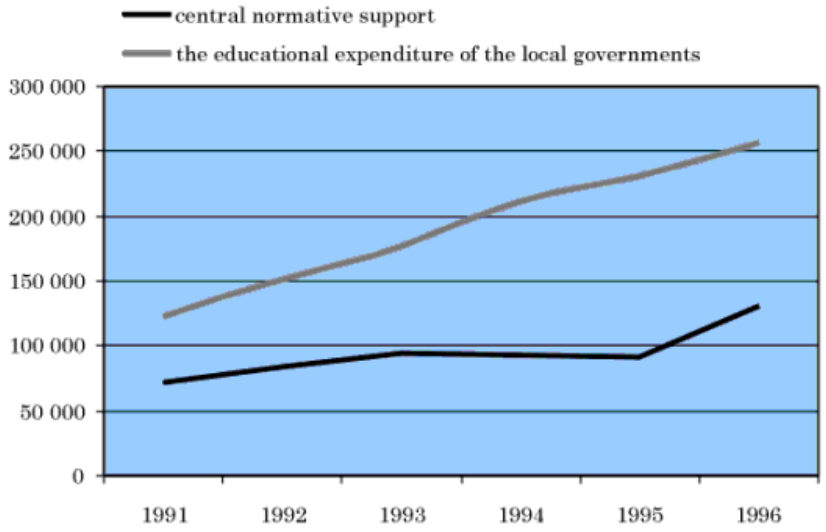
Within the direct public educational expenditure of the state the support for the dynamic *non-local governmental sector (private, church and foundational institutions)* is an ever growing item, which appears in the budget of the Ministry of Education. While in 1992 the state support for public education in the non-local governmental sector was 1.1 billion HUF, the corresponding item in 1996 amounted to 5.5 billion HUF. This means a more than twofold growth even in real value. A bigger proportion (62%) of the state support for the non-local governmental sector serves the financing of the denominational schools.

Educational expenditure is by far the biggest item within *the expendituresof the local governments.* Among the running costs of the local governments in 1995 26.9% was spent on education, 16.8% on health care, 10.9% on the administrative tasks, 5.4% for social welfare, and 4.9% for the tasks of settlement management. The local governments have *several resources* to cover the costs of public education and of other public tasks. More than one-third of the resources (38% in 1995) come from the direct state grants, large proportions of which (29% of the total state support in 1995) are normative grants. The normative, or per capita, grant for public educational purposes is just one of these central normative grants. The local governments have further significant resources from the revenues of their own institutions, from the locally levied taxes, and from their share of the centrally collected and partly redistributed personal income taxes. The local governments that maintain the institutions of public education can be said to stand on several feet from an economic point of view. The proportion of their own incomes among their revenues is growing, while the proportion of the state support is decreasing. Consequently, the financial situation of public education, which is determined basically by the financial situation of the local governments, is becoming more and more dependent on the local governments' own incomes.

It was a characteristic feature of the connections between the central budget and the local governmental budgets that up till 1995 the proportion increased of those expenditures that the local governments had to cover from their other resources, partly from the non-educational state grants and partly from their own incomes. So the gap

between the central normative grants and the actual expenditures of the local governments widened. Due to a significant rise in the public educational normatives this trend came to a halt in 1996 (*see Figure 2*).

Figure 2
The educational expenditures of the local governments and the central normative support for education, 1991–1996 (million HUF)

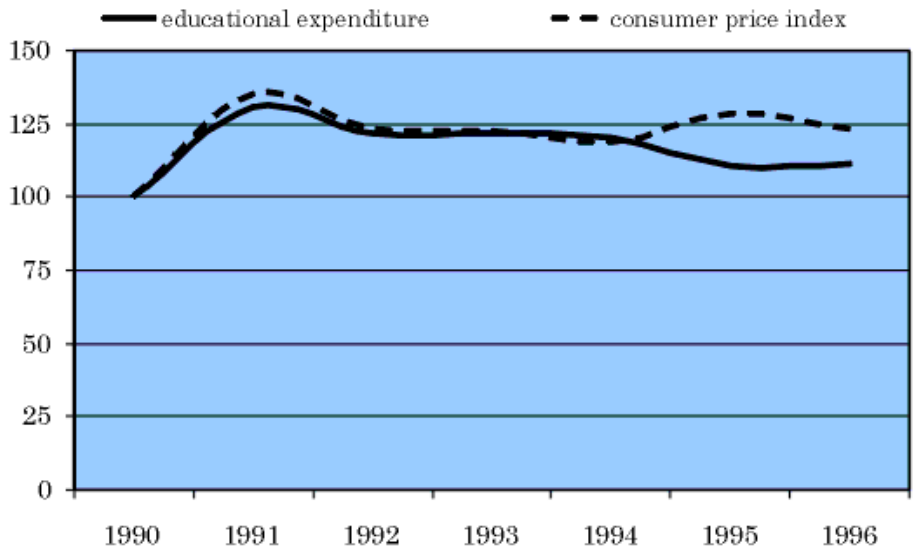


Source: Ministry of Education, Department of Public Educational Planning.

Public educational expenditures

As we have seen the size of the amount devoted to public education mainly depends on the budgetary decisions of the local governments. For an overall amount the local governments budgetary accounts have to be added up. According to the data of the Ministry of Finance the central budget devoted 340,562 million HUF to education in 1996, out of which 263,401 million HUF (73%) was the share of pre-primary, primary and secondary education together. This amount was 10.2% higher than the one in the previous year. Despite the budgetary constraints, the growth of public educational expenditures kept pace with the rate of inflation every year between 1991 and 1994. But this tendency was broken by the radical fiscal restrictions introduced by the central government in 1995. *In 1995 and 1996 the public educational expenditures of the central budget decreased in real value (see Figure 3).*

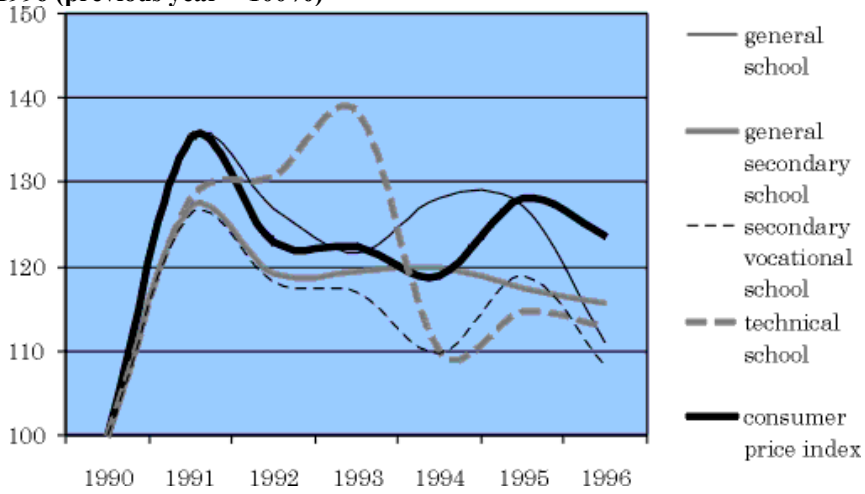
Figure 3
Growth in educational expenditures and changes in the consumer price index, 1990–1996 (previous year = 100%)



Source: Calculated by Júlia Varga from the data of the Central Statistical Office.

There is a correlation between the changes in the number of pupils and the growth of the public educational expenditure not keeping pace with the inflation rate. The total amount of the state normative grants (the per capita grants) that is given to the maintainers depends on the number of pupils attended by their institutions. The amount of the normative state grant per pupil remained the same between 1993 and 1995 despite the then average 20% inflation rate and the decline in pupil numbers, which meant that the real value of the central educational grants decreased considerably. This tendency only changed in 1996, when the rate of the normative state grants started to increase again. It is important to stress at the same time that the *per pupil expenses* did not change the same way at every educational level. This indicator, obviously, showed growth at those levels of education where the decline in pupil numbers was sharp: at the general school until 1995 and at the technical school until 1993. In the types of schools – the general and vocational secondary schools – where the pupil numbers rose the growth of the per pupil expenses was slower (*see Figure 4*).

Figure 4
The growth rate of the total educational expenditure per one student and the consumer price index, 1990–1996 (previous year = 100%)

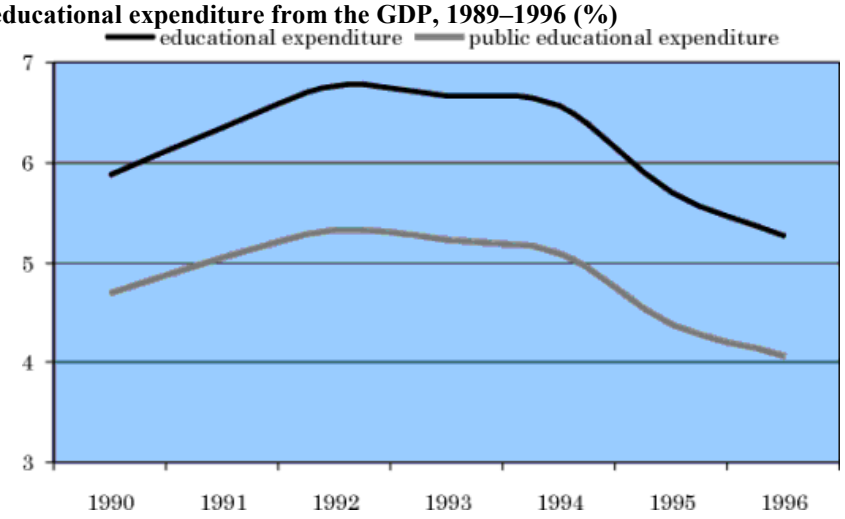


Source: Calculated by Júlia Varga from the data of the Central Statistical Office; for 1996: the educational statistics of the Ministry of Education.

The expenses in proportion to the gross domestic product (GDP)

To see how public educational expenditures changed in proportion to the gross domestic product in Hungary during the 1990s we have to take into account the whole context of public financing, the trends in economic policy, and the efforts of the government. Public educations share of the gross domestic product grew between 1989 and 1992. The main reason for this was that while the economic crisis made the GDP plummet, during those years the public educational expenditures increased fast or remained unchanged in real value. In other words, the dramatic economic crisis practically did not affect public education until 1992. This was the reason why Hungary at the beginning of the 1990s belonged to those countries which, by international comparison, spent the biggest proportion of their GDP on public education. However, what started in 1992 strengthened by the middle of the decade: a gradual decrease set in in the proportions spent on public education. The rate of the decrease was extraordinary in 1995. According to the data of the Ministry of Finance 5.09% of the GDP was spent on public education in 1994, but only 4.37% in 1995, and a mere 4.06% in 1996 (*see Figure 5*).

Figure 5
Ratio of the educational expenditure from the GDP, 1989–1996 (%)



Source: Calculated by László Limbacher.

While between 1989 and 1994 the real value of the GDP decreased by about 20%, the public educational expenditure maintained, even increased, its real value until 1992. The real value of the public educational expenditure started to decrease when the GDPs decline in real value had already slowed, and growth began. So the impacts of the economic crisis and the consecutive fiscal restrictions did not reach education parallel with the crisis but years later. This timelag can be explained by the decentralised character of school maintenance: the local decision-makers, who set the actual extent of educational expenditure, responded slowly to the slimming down of the resources. So – though the growth rate of the central state grants remained below the inflation rate – the local maintainers compensated for the inflation from other sources for some time. This was how, compared to other countries, Hungary could spend *a much bigger proportion* on public education *than* was explained by *its economic productivity.* Due to the restrictive measures taken by the central government in 1995 a similar statement would not be valid for today.

The structure of the expenditures

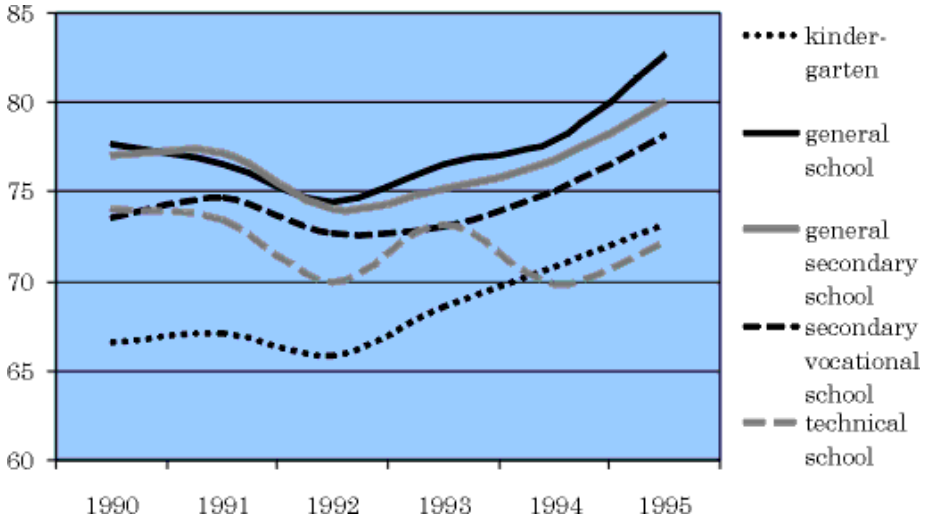
The internal proportions in educational expenditure have changed little, and changed slowly, in the past few years: until 1995 the local decisions preserved the basic proportions given to the different educational levels. While the share of public education from the total educational expenditures stayed around 77-79%, the share of the various educational levels hardly changed between 1990 and 1996 despite the

changes in the number of pupils. The educational expenditures of the general school remained around 29-31% even though the number of pupils taught at this level decreased most. The share of secondary education – despite the increase of pupils numbers – stayed around 24-26%. But from 1993 onwards some rearrangement could be perceived between secondary education and vocational education for skilled workers (technical schooling). Within secondary education the expenditure devoted to technical schooling started to decrease with several years of delay (from 1993) though its rate remained below the rate of decrease in pupil numbers. A continual and constant decrease happened only in the indirect expenditures of education, such as the provision of after-school supervision and student hostels.

From 1990 a continual decrease in the capital expenditures can be perceived, as opposed to the running costs of education. The decrease of this rate could be explained by the decline in pupil numbers in the general schools, but until 1996 there was a decrease in capital expenditure in secondary education as well, where the pupil numbers rose by 20% between 1990 and 1995.

Salaries constitute the item of expenditure that proved the most stable up till 1995. The local decision-makers first reduced the proportion of capital expenditure as compared to the running costs of education, then, within the running costs, they cut back on the auxiliary services of education, i.e. on the costs of welfare expenditure. Finally there came a reduction of the material expenditure, for example less and less was spent on professional materials. For a long time the maintainers did not resort to the tool of reducing the number of employees. As a consequence, salaries took up an ever growing proportion of the educational expenditure despite the decrease of their real value. (*See Figure 6.*) In 1996 the increase of teacher salaries remained much below the rate of inflation: while there was a 23.6% rise in consumer price index, the nominal salaries of those employed in public education rose by an average of 11.7%.

Figure 6
Ratio of salary expenditures from regular educational expenditures, by level of education, 1990–1995 (%)



Source: Calculated by Júlia Varga from the data of the Central Statistical Office.

Chapter C
The education system, progress within the system

1. The structure of the education system in Hungary

Compulsory schooling in Hungary lasts from 6 to 16 years of age. (The legal regulations allow for the differentiated beginning of school between ages 5 and 7). The 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act raised the end of compulsory schooling to the age of 18, but only starting with those who enter primary school in the 1998/99 school year. So the vast majority of children at school today have to participate in school education until they are 16. Children can satisfy the requirement of compulsory schooling by attending educational institutions at the primary and the secondary levels.

The system of Hungarian school education has been under review for many years. The structure of the eight-grade general school and the consecutive 3 or 4 years of secondary education, which was established in most socialist countries of Europe after 1945, started to come under question after 1990, when the autonomy of the local and the institutional levels increased and the educational monopoly of the state was

abolished. The 1993 Public Education Act already reflected the changing school structure. As a consequence, the *definitions* of primary schooling and secondary schooling were modified and the formerly firm division between *general and vocational* secondary education disappeared.

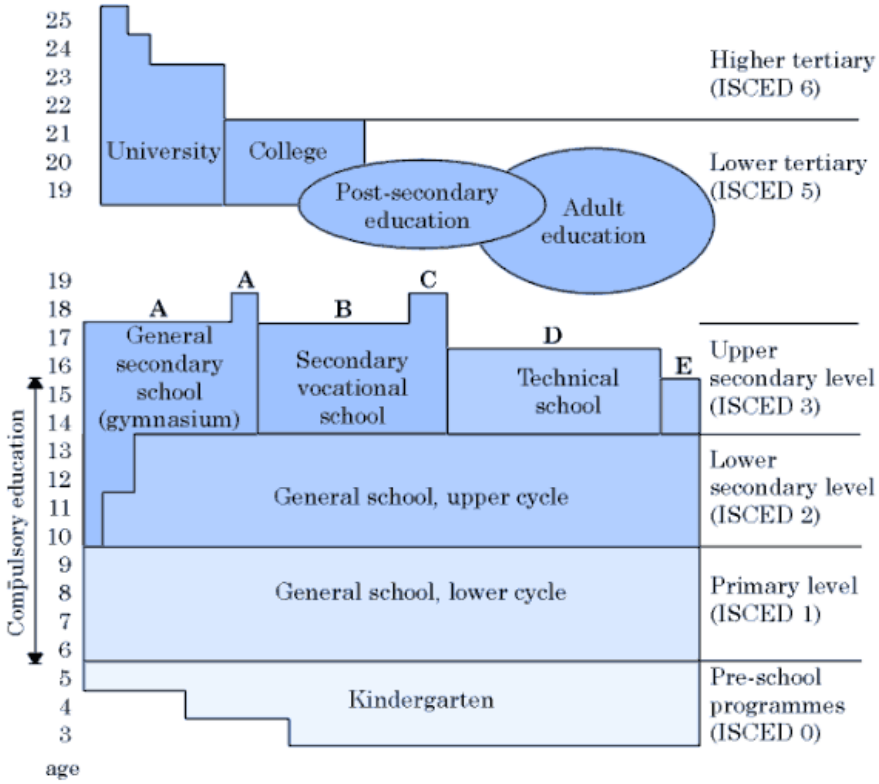
It is important to emphasise that the transformation of the Hungarian school system is not controlled by the state, nor is it the product of far-reaching, central strategic decisions. It has basically taken place as the result of numerous, small-scale efforts at the regional and institutional levels. The most important *demographic* reason for the structural changes in secondary education is the decline in the number of pupils who leave the general school. Between 1989 and 1996 the number of general school leavers dropped from 171 thousand to 120 thousand and the schools had to make great efforts to ensure the pupil numbers that would allow for the continuation of their operation. The important *administrative* reason for the changes is that decision-making about pupil enrolment and about the determination of the educational profiles is allocated to the local, maintainer level. The factors mentioned so far have been further strengthened by the *financing system* of education, which makes the support of institutions mainly dependent on the number of pupils. Due to the special interaction and the parallel timing of these factors the educational institutions have found themselves in a hitherto unknown field of competition, where they have to exploit every means available to ensure an appropriate number of pupils so that they can continue their operation and maintain their number of teaching posts.

Figure 1 shows the vertical structure of Hungarian education and reflects the recent changes.

Changes in the horizontal structure of the education system. Due to the general crisis and the re-structuring of the vocational training sector which does not lead to (upper) secondary qualifications, the number of pupils enrolled *in the technical education of skilled workers* decreased dramatically, and the numbers enrolling *in secondary schools leading to the final examinations* has risen in parallel. While in the 1990/91 school year 48.6% of the general school leavers enrolled in schools leading to the final examinations, the corresponding rate was 61.9% in 1996/97. Within secondary education enrolments in the secondary vocational schools grew more than enrolments in the general secondary schools (gymnasium).

A characteristic of the horizontal structural changes is that the number of secondary institutions with a mixed profile has grown considerably. This does not mean that new institutions have been founded but that a growing proportion of the secondary schools offer more than one types of *educational programme* for their pupils. Besides their own characteristic choice (dual language classes, 6 and 8-grade gymnasium, specialised classes or classes following advanced level curricula, etc.) the gymnasia often offer optional vocational programmes to prepare their students for the labour market, and they organise courses for those beyond the school leaving final examinations. The secondary vocational schools often start gymnasium classes, and the technical schools start secondary vocational classes.

Figure 1
The structure of the Hungarian education system: a static overview



A: secondary school leaving certificate

B: secondary school leaving certificate and vocational qualification

C: technician qualification

D: skilled worker qualification

E: lower-level trade school qualification

Changes in the vertical structure of the education system. The vertical re-structuring of the education system, the changes of the division lines between the

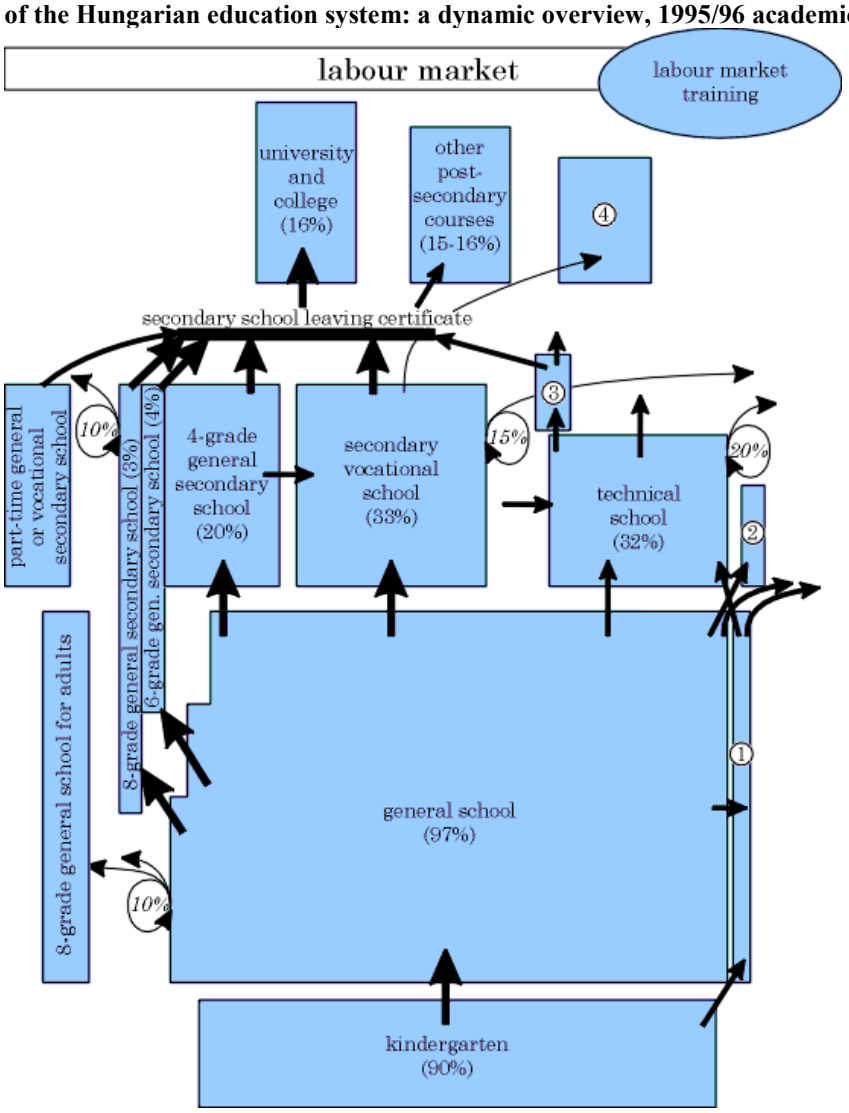
educational levels, and the changes of the lengths of certain educational cycles all reflect the spontaneous processes of the past few years. As a result of the changes, some of the general schools provide longer or shorter schooling than formerly. They often start 9th or 10th grades, a special trade school,[1] or gymnasium classes. The growth of the special trade schools is recently the most common phenomenon. A majority of the general secondary schools, the gymnasia, offer today 6 or 8-year-long education as well, and the 5-grade educational forms (with a 0th preparatory year) have also become common. Most of the new-structure gymnasia have adopted the 6-grade form. A lot of the secondary vocational schools have started 5th and 6th grades. The changes in the vertical structure of the system are influenced by the National Core Curriculum (NCC) from September 1998 on, when the schools introduce the local curricula, in accordance with the requirements of the NCC in grades 1 and 7 (for more detail on this *see Chapter D: Curricula, examinations and pupil attainment*).

As a result of the structural changes, multi-level connections characterise the transition between primary and secondary schooling, i.e. there are several vertical structures side by side. Thus, pupils, for example, may decide to enter a secondary school at various ages (at the age of 10, 12, or 14) but they may stay on at the general school until they are 16. These options have increased the freedom of schooling and the variety of schools to choose from, but they may give some cause for concern when it comes to their implication for social policies. (*See* in more detail in *Chapter F: The strengths and the weaknesses of the system*.)

The data that show the participation of the various age groups in education reveal a lot about an education system. According to the data of the 1996 Micro-Census only slightly more than 40% of the 18 and 19-year-olds were still in the system, and a little more than 11% of the 20-24 old age group. Participation in education is very low for those over 30 years of age: life-long learning may become a mass phenomenon for the young generations still growing up today. The changes of the school structure are also well reflected by the data that show grade by grade how many pupils take part in the different educational programmes. Due to the spreading of the 6 and 8-grade gymnasia more than 8% of the 7th graders attended a gymnasium rather than a regular general school in the 1996/97 school year. The dynamic processes, i.e. *the movement of pupils* within the education system, is shown by *Figure 2*.

From the perspective of educational policy the structural changes in Hungary in the 1990s can be described as *the expansion of secondary schooling*. The expansion of secondary schooling,[2] the rapid growth in pupil numbers began in the second half of the 1980s. By the middle of the 1990s some two-thirds of every age group entering secondary education enrolled in a *secondary* school, and one-fourth of them entered a secondary school that offered general education, and one-third a school of vocational education.

Figure 2
The structure of the Hungarian education system: a dynamic overview, 1995/96 academic year



Ś 8-grade general school for children with special educational needs (3%)

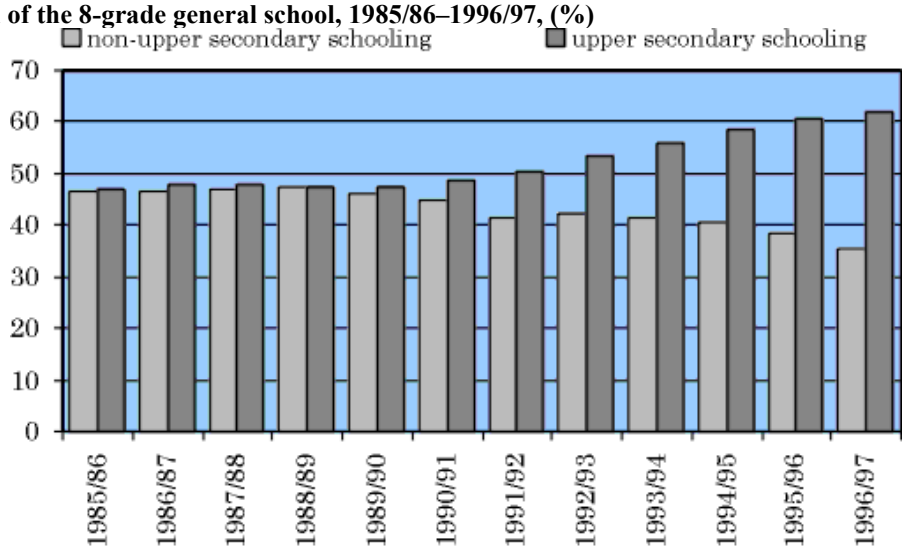
Ť other trade schools (4%) Ž full-time secondary school for skilled workers (6%)

Ź 5th and 6th grades of secondary vocational schools

Note: The thick arrows indicate the 'royal route' of further education, the one leading to higher education. The numbers in brakets indicate the proportion of the age-group attending to the given

educational form. The numbers in italics indicate the drop-out rate estimates at the given educational level or form.

Figure 3
Rates of enrolment in secondary schools and in other forms of further education after the completion of the 8-grade general school, 1985/86–1996/97, (%)



Source: Ministry of Education, educational statistics; pre-disclosed data of the Central Statistical Office.

1.1. The kindergarten

Hungarian kindergartens have a long pedagogical and professional history. The past 20-year development of the kindergarten infrastructure has reached the level that it can now cater for the total kindergarten age population. Kindergarten education has long been treated by the public educational acts as an integral part of the education system.

Kindergartens educate children from age 3 to the time when they reach the level of maturity to enter school, but there is an age limit of 7 for this. From the year when the child reaches age 5 he/she has to take part in the school-preparatory training that is carried out as part of kindergarten education. This obligation is sometimes called compulsory kindergarten schooling, sometimes compulsory nurturing. The number of kindergartens decreased from 4718 to 4708 between 1990 and 1996. The biggest decrease happened among kindergartens maintained by the local governments (from 4620 to 4540) but in parallel the number of non-local government-maintained kindergartens rose from 98 to 168. Among the latter especially, the number of church and foundation kindergartens increased. During the same period the number of kindergarten places decreased from 385 thousand to 371 thousand though the annual

number of kindergarten age children remained around 395 thousand. As a consequence, the number of children per group and per adult slightly increased and the kindergartens became overcrowded. (See the summary of the data in *Table 1*.)

Table 1
The major indicators of kindergartens, 1990/91–1996/97

	1990/91	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1996/97 1990=100
Number of kindergartens	4718 (4620)*	4719	4720 (4522)*	4708 (4540)*	99.8
Number of places available, in thousands	385.0	376.4	373.2	371.4	96.5
Number of teaching staff	33 635	33 007	32 320	31 891	94.8
Number of children in kindergarten, in thousands	391.1	396.2	399.3	394.3	100.8
As a percentage of all entitled to provision	84.9	86.3	87.2	87.5	103.1
Number of children per 100 places	102	106	107	106	103.9
Number of groups	16 055	16 072	15 813	15 701	97.8
Number of children per group	24.4	24.7	25.3	25.1	102.9
Number of children per adult	11.6	12.0	12.4	12.4	106.9

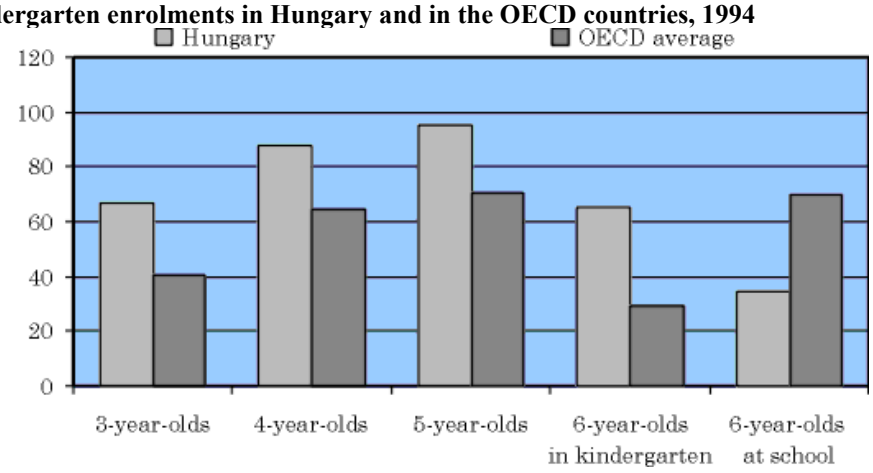
Source: Pocketbook of Hungarian Statistics, 1996.

* number of kindergartens maintained by the local governments

Children of the suitable age attend kindergarten in large numbers in every age group. In 1992, 85% of all 3-5-year-old children attended kindergarten and this rate reached 90% by 1996. Practically all children over 5 years of age attend a kindergarten. The number of children enrolled in kindergartens in Hungary is very high by international comparison. (*See Figure 4*.) According to the comparative data of the OECD in 1994 children in Hungary attend kindergarten for an average of 3.2 years. As a consequence of the differentiated primary school entry, half of the children who enter kindergarten at the age of 3 attend it for 4 years. Reaching the maturity required for schooling is the condition for entering the primary school. Maturity is certified by the head of the kindergarten, who consults the kindergarten

teachers and the speech therapist. (If the child has not attended kindergarten the certificate is given by an educational counsellor.) The certificate has to be shown when the child is being enrolled in a school.

Figure 4
Rate of kindergarten enrolments in Hungary and in the OECD countries, 1994



Source: Education at a Glance, 1996.

1.2. The general school

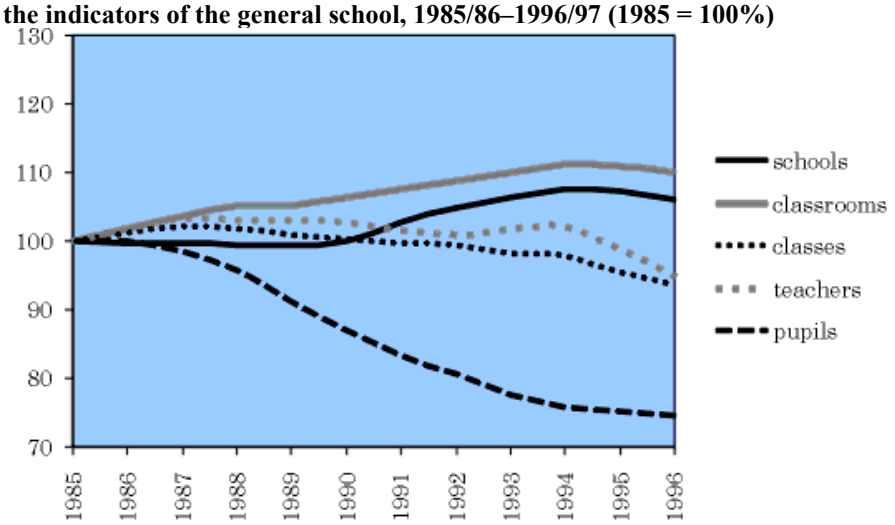
The most important institution of basic education in Hungary is the 8-grade general school. According to ISCED, the International Standard Classification for Education, this type includes the primary and the lower secondary levels of education.

The *number of general schools* was fairly stable in the 1980s, grew in the first half of the 1990s, but then the growth came to a halt in 1995 followed by a decrease. Yet in September 1996 there were still 6.7% more general schools than in 1990. The number of classrooms grew until 1995, then started to decrease a little. The number of classes has decreased since 1988, and the number of pupils has been in a decline since 1987. The last peak in pupil numbers was in 1986 with 1,300,000. Within ten years this number decreased by more than 300,000: in 1996 only *three-thirds* of the pupil numbers of ten years before attended the general school. The number of general school teachers grew significantly in 1987, fluctuated around 90,000 for several years, then shrank sharply in 1995 and 1996. (*See Figure 5*.)

There are several, hardly irreconcilable trends behind these rather controversial data. The dramatic decrease in pupil and class numbers cannot solely be explained by the general and constant decline in the birth rate: a previously populous age group

(those born between 1974 and 1978) started to leave the general school from 1988. At the same time this was the period (the beginning of the 1990s) when – as a consequence of the political change in the regime the state monopoly on schooling was abolished – a number of new schools were opened. (This explains the increase in the number of schools and partly the increase in teacher numbers.) There were schools opened by private persons, foundations and denominations but also by a number of small towns as well. When the schools ownership was transferred to the local governments nationwide many of the small local governments decided either to re-open their former school – which may have been closed by a former centrally-decided dictat – or to found a new school if they had never had one. This, on the one hand, resulted in the favourable changes of the most important indicators of the general school in the 1990s (e.g. the number of pupils per teacher or per classroom) but, on the other hand, led to difficulties in the financing of schools. (See in more detail in *Chapter F: The strengths and the weaknesses of the system*.)

Figure 5
Changes in the indicators of the general school, 1985/86–1996/97 (1985 = 100%)



Source: Ministry of Education, educational statistics, pre-disclosed data.

The *structure of school maintenance* has undergone significant changes as well. In 1996/97 92% of the schools belonged to the local governments, and 94% of all pupils learnt in such schools. The proportion of denominational and foundational schools has grown dynamically but they remain a small sector: in the school year of

1996/97 5.4% of the institutions and 4% of the pupils belonged to them as opposed to the 3.1% and the 2.1% of three years before (*see Table 2*).

Table 2
The numbers and rates of general schools, pupils, and teachers by maintainers, 1993 and 1996

	local government		county government		central budgetary organ		church		foundation/private individual	
	1993	1996	1993	1996	1993	1996	1993	1996	1993	1996
number of schools	3574	3470	49	60	30	30	94	145	21	56
schools, %	94.8	92.2	1.3	1.6	0.8	0.8	2.5	3.9	0.6	1.5
number of pupils	969 409	908 164	4841	6582	13 210	12 413	19 449	32 486	2212	5907
pupils, %	96.0	94.0	0.5	1.7	1.3	1.3	1.9	3.4	0.2	0.6
number of teachers	86 000	78 490	486	553	1332	1191	1521	2643	283	731
teachers, %	95.9	93.8	0.5	0.7	1.5	1.4	1.7	3.2	0.3	0.9
pupil/teacher ratio	11.3	11.6	10.0	11.9	9.9	10.4	12.8	12.3	7.9	8.1

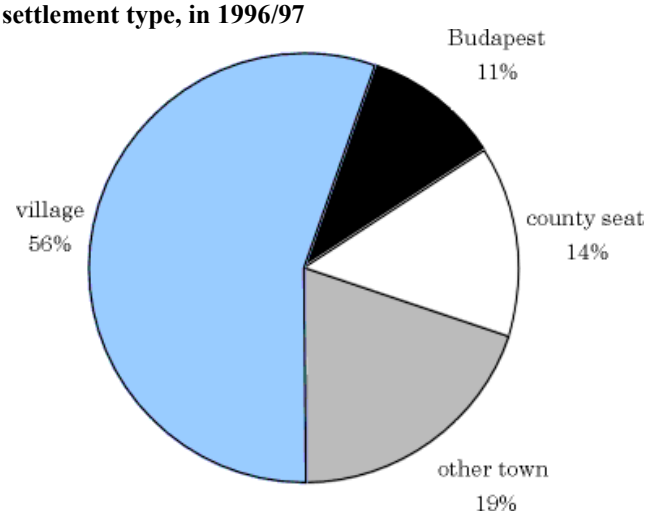
Source: Ministry of Education, educational statistics, pre-disclosed data.

So far we have spoken of the general school with 8-grades, as this is the main type. However, in 21.7% of the general schools there are less than 8 *grades* but only 5.3% of all pupils attend such schools. The majority of the general schools that have less than eight grades operate with four. General school education can be characterised by two extremes: the majority of the pupils attend bigger-size schools of which there are fewer, and the rest of the pupils go to a large number of small schools. While 5.5% of all schools have fewer than 20 pupils, only 0.3% of all pupils learn at such schools. The proportion of schools with under 100 pupils is 25.8% but only 4.9% of all pupils learn in them. In 1996/97 the average school size was 257 pupils per institution but in half of the schools the pupil number was under 200.

A small school as an institution is first of all the problem of the small towns and villages in Hungary. More than half of the schools operate in villages (for the distribution of schools by settlement type *see Figure 6*) but only 44% of the classes,

42% of the teachers, and 37% of the pupils attend these schools. Consequently the number of pupils per school is much lower in villages than in towns. There is a smaller difference between town schools and village schools in the number of pupils per one class or one teacher.

Figure 6
Number of schools by settlement type, in 1996/97



Source: Ministry of Education, educational statistics, pre-disclosed data.

Pupil flows

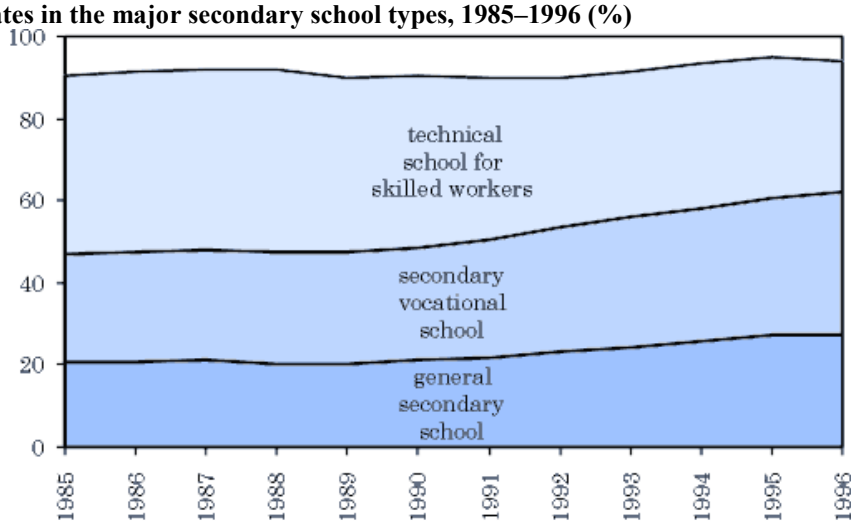
In 1996/97 2% of the children started school at the age of 5, 81% of children at the age of 6, and 16% of the children at the age of 7. Enrolling children in school when they are over 6 is more and more popular with parents. The pupil retaining capacity of the general school has been more or less stable for years. Dropping out during the school year is fairly rare, and 99% of pupils enrolled in September finish the grade they started. The number of pupils repeating a grade is higher in grades 1, 5, and 6, and the lowest in grade 8. (For example, the number of repeaters was highest in grade 1: 3.9% of all first-graders failed in 1996 while only 0.5% of eighth-graders did so.) 3.2% of pupils did not complete the general school until the end of compulsory schooling (this rate was 6.1% in 1990).

It has already been mentioned that as a consequence of the vertical changes in the school structure the length of the educational cycles and the division lines between the various educational levels have changed. In the 1994/95 school year 55.5% of the traditional gymnasia (general secondary schools) and the ones with a mixed profile

started 6 or 8-grade-long education. This process has major implications for the pupil flows within the compulsory period of schooling: the 6 and 8-grade gymnasia mean serious competition for the upper grades of the general school, and the spreading of these types of secondary schools determines the possible progress within the school system of the 10-14-year-old pupils. Though the number of 5-8-graders who attend 6 and 8-grade gymnasia has grown dynamically (their 1993 number doubled by 1996, and as compared to 1991 their number became 7 times as much) the proportion of pupils within the age cohorts attending such classes is still rather low. 3.2% of 5th and 6th graders, and 7.7% of the 7th and 8th graders attend these gymnasia.

The proportion of pupils who chose further studies upon the completion of the general school rose from 93.6% to 99.3% between 1985 and 1995. But there was a decline in the 1996/97 school year. As we have indicated it before the number of pupils who chose secondary schools leading to the final examinations has grown constantly and steadily, and the number of those entering a technical school decreased. The number of pupils enrolling in the gymnasia in 1996 was more than one quarter, and the number of pupils enrolling in the secondary vocational schools was more than one third of all general school leavers. Pupils continuing their education in the technical schools is still high but it has been decreasing since 1989, and this decrease seems to have accelerated recently. (*See Figure 7.*)

Figure 7
Enrolment rates in the major secondary school types, 1985–1996 (%)



Source: Ministry of Education, educational statistics, pre-disclosed data.

1.3. Secondary education

Secondary education in the Hungarian system may be defined as the institutional level that receives pupils who have completed the 8-grade general school. The international standard classification of education (ISCED) calls this level upper secondary education. We have to differentiate between the institutions of secondary education in two respects. One is whether they offer general or vocational education, the other whether they prepare for the secondary school leaving examinations or not (the ones that do are usually called by the collective term of secondary education).

As a consequence of the structural changes in the school system we have to differentiate more and more often between three different concepts: *a type of school, an educational level, and an educational or training programme.* Within any institution there can be a variety of educational programmes followed, which lead to different educational qualifications. There are more and more institutions in Hungary today that offer educational programmes at different educational levels so it is difficult to introduce the system of secondary education with the help of school types. Here will be introduced the three basic institute types of secondary education and the most characteristic changes within them highlighted.

The type of general secondary school that prepares for the school leaving final examinations, *the gymnasium,* nowadays refers to a variety of institutions with different lengths (4, 6, or 8 grades) and different standards. Though preparation for higher education remains the major objective of gymnasium education, many of the gymnasia see the support of the preparation for the labour market an objective of similar importance.

The type of school that prepares for the school leaving final examinations and offers vocational training at the same time, the secondary vocational school, used to refer to three types of schools with different educational objectives: (a) the 5-year-long secondary vocational school, which trained secondary level technicians, (b) the 4 or 5-year-long secondary vocational schools, which mainly prepared for occupations in the service sector, and (c) the 4-year long secondary vocational and technical schools, which lead both to the final examinations and to the skilled worker qualifications. Nowadays the first two grades of the secondary vocational schools are

similar to those of the gymnasia, and vocational training often takes place in grades 5 and 6 (*see in more detail below*).

The main institution type of *secondary vocational education that does not lead to the school leaving final examinations* is the 3-year-long *technical school for skilled workers*. Taking the enrolling pupil numbers the 2-year-long *trade school* is of decreasing importance.

The characteristics of the institutions

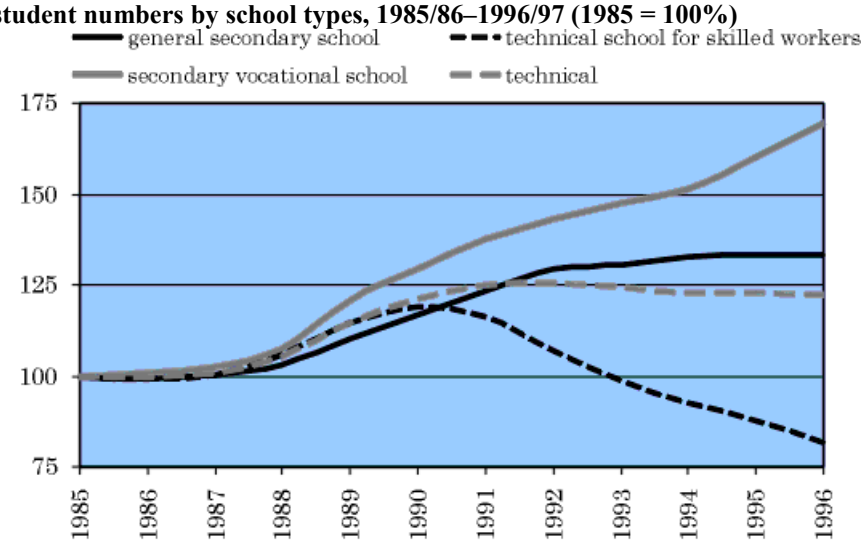
According to the official statistics the number of secondary schools rose from 560 to 980, that is by 75%, between 1985 and 1996. But this growth rate reflects the inadequacies of the official statistics rather than the actual growth because the statistical tools cannot handle the schools that offer different programmes as one, but count the different educational programmes as separate schools. This is why the number of institutions cannot be accepted as authentic. The changes in secondary education are better described by the number of the *pupil classes or groups that follow a given educational programme,* or by *the number of students*.

The number of *classes* at the secondary schools that lead to the final examinations rose by 68% compared to 1985, and by 24% compared to 1990. The number of classes at the technical schools on the other hand has decreased since 1992: the rate of the decrease between 1992/93 and 1996/97 was almost 18%.

The total number of students in secondary education grew until 1992, since when there has been a slight decrease. The main reason for this can be sought in demographic trends: the catchment base of secondary education has become smaller. Another factor is that the growth rate of secondary enrolments has slowed down. The biggest growth rate of the past few years has been produced by the number of secondary vocational school students: their number increased by 70% compared to 1985, and by 40% compared to 1990. The number of students attending a gymnasium increased slightly, with a lower rate than the average, during the 1980s, and there came a bigger than average increase in the first half of the 1990s: the growth rate was 25% between 1990 and 1996. But then the growth halted. As an overall outcome, the proportion of those in secondary education who attend a gymnasium has always decreased slightly for the past decade, except for 1992/93. Their current proportion is

less than 40%. Within secondary vocational schools the number of those students has grown most dynamically who study in the economics fields (commerce, hospitality, economics). The number of technical school students decreased steadily in the 1990s, since 1993 it has been below the level of 1985. The numbers enrolling in trade schools have also declined significantly (*see Figure 8*).

Figure 8
Changes in student numbers by school types, 1985/86–1996/97 (1985 = 100%)



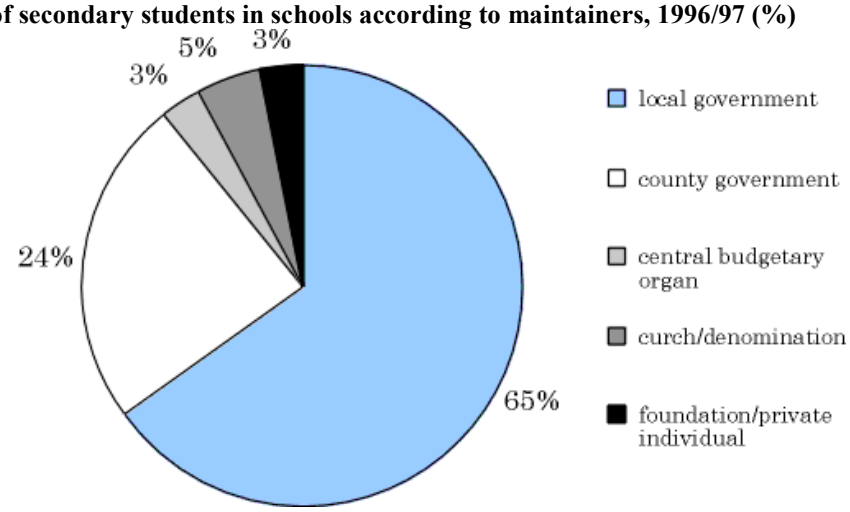
Source: Ministry of Education, educational statistics, pre-disclosed data.

As opposed to the general schools the number of teachers continued to rise in the secondary schools after 1995 as well. In 1996 secondary schools leading to the final examinations employed 1.64 times as many teachers as in 1985 while the number of students became only 1.53 times as many. The number of teachers in the technical schools has decreased since 1991, and the number of teachers in the trade schools of shorthand-typing has decreased since 1990. The student/teacher ratio in the whole of secondary education leading to the final examinations has not changed much in the past one or two years.

In the 1996/97 school year 86% of the secondary schools were *maintained* by the local governments or by the state, and 14% were a church or a foundational school. The number of secondary schools maintained by the local governments has gradually decreased, while the ones maintained by the county governments became more numerous. The most dynamic among growth of the church and foundational schools has been produced at the secondary level, especially among the gymnasia: the biggest

expansion has happened in the number of denominational gymnasia. Due to the smaller sizes of the institutions the proportion of students attending private or church schools is much lower than the overall proportion of such institutions. In 1996/97 school year 92% of all students attended a school maintained by a local government or by the state, and 8% studied in the church and private sector (*see Figure 9*).

Figure 9
Breakdown of secondary students in schools according to maintainers, 1996/97 (%)



Source: Pre-disclosed educational statistics.

Preparation for higher education. The students of the high-standard secondary schools are good achievers at the study competitions, and their educational attainment is well over the average as it is confirmed by the Monitor surveys (*see Chapter D on Curricula, examinations, pupil attainment).* These schools are much sought-after and the majority of their leaving students are admitted to the higher educational institutions. Most of these elite schools are regular gymnasia, but some of the World Bank-supported secondary vocational schools belong to them, too. Beyond some regular 4-grade gymnasia, several 6 or 8-grade gymnasia are part of this circle, as are the dual-language gymnasia. (The 6 or 8-grade gymnasium programmes usually run parallel with the 4-grade gymnasium, so they do not usually operate as separate schools.) The majority of the denominational secondary schools are gymnasia, and most of them have the 6 or 8-grade long structure.

As we have seen earlier, the number of students attending the 6 or 8-grade gymnasia has grown dramatically for the past few years but their proportion within

the age group is not significant. The situation is different if we analyse the phenomenon from the point of view of gymnasium students. The 6 and 8-grade gymnasia play an ever more important role among the gymnasia. Students attending such gymnasia constitute 27% of the total number of gymnasium students and, according to reliable short-term forecasts, this proportion may raise to 30% before 2000. So, even though the presence of the 6 and 8-grade gymnasium classes make the educational choice wider, and they are important venues of the nurturing of talents, they actually limit the chances of the 14-year-olds to get into a gymnasium. Many of the gymnasium places are filled with pupils of 10 to 14 years of age and the number of places does not increase fast enough to meet the demand for them. The demands for general academic secondary education are partly satisfied by the new-model secondary vocational schools but, in view of the enrolment proportions, these schools cannot yet replace the traditional gymnasia.

The combination of general and vocational education: schools with a mixed profile. The spreading of schools with a mixed profile shows that general education and secondary education are coming closer to each other: more and more gymnasia offer practical, market-oriented programmes, and a lot of institutions of vocational training introduce a new model of vocational education where general education is offered at an advanced level.

In the new model of vocational education, introduced at the beginning of the 1990s with the help of a World Bank loan and expertise, the formula of the training structure is 2+2+(1-2). The first two years follow the requirements of the National Core Curriculum and offer general education. 40% of the lessons in the second two years serve the foundation of the vocational training but the students of the different occupational branches still study together in this cycle. The finishing cycle, grade 5, or even grade 6, is devoted to specialised vocational education. This model has been spreading fast, for a long time now it cannot be considered a pilot model. Initially there were 61 schools, then another 18 applicants, selected to take part in this programme. With the financial support of the European Union (*PHARE programme*) further 71 schools joined in. The managers of the programme know of some further 70-80 schools that follow the same model without any central support. Almost one-third of the secondary vocational schools have at least one World Bank class. There were 15 to 20 thousand secondary vocational students who followed a World Bank

programme in 1996/97, which means every tenth student in secondary vocational education in general, and every fifth or sixth student in grade 1. The first students having completed this programme took the final school-leaving examinations in summer 1997.

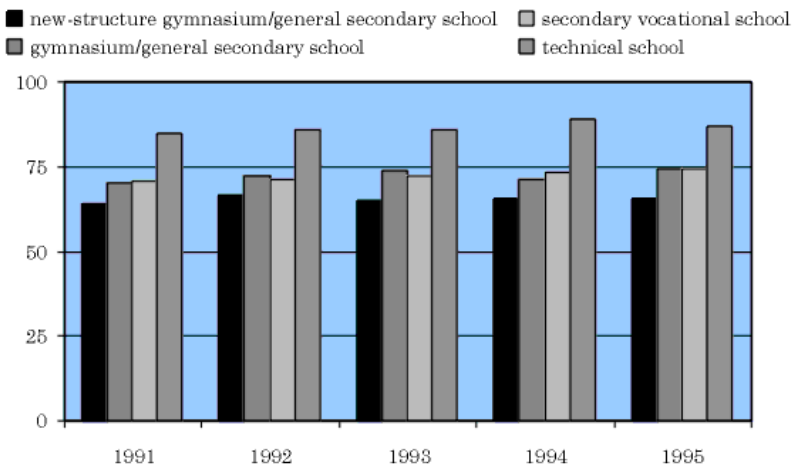
Technical schools and trade schools. According to the ruling of the 1993 Public Education Act and the National Core Curriculum in grades 9 and 10 technical schools have to provide general education as well. (Vocational education traditionally started in grade 9.) This is a big challenge for most of these schools because assuring the proper standards is a difficult task for a lot of them, and because temporary employment problems might arise with the teachers of practical vocational subjects.

As was mentioned before, the most dynamically increasing institutional sector of public education was the *special trade school* in the first years of the 1990s. This type of school first served to cater for the demographic peak (age groups from the baby-boom between 1974 and 1978), then provided compensation for the narrowing possibilities of further studies when the infrastructure of technical education for skilled workers was being dismantled. The special trade schools also admitted those pupils who could not make it into the technical schools for skilled workers. Special trade school education was usually offered by the general schools and by the technical schools. The launching of this kind of programme by the general schools was usually aimed at the maintenance of pupil numbers and at the acquisition of the substantial state grants. A further aim was to start practical vocational programmes in villages and small towns where there could be no opportunities earlier to offer such programmes. There is a lot of variety of, and a lot of uncertainties over the educational contents, the curricula, and the certificates issued by these schools. In the 1990s there have been two basic forms of education carried out in the special trade schools. One is a transitional type of practical training to provide the pupils with career-orientation, the other is teaching the pupils some vocational skills to improve their chances of employment. From 1994 on, the number of pupils attending such schools has decreased. But the extension of general education until the age of 16, and the condition that vocational education proper may only start upon the completion of grade 10, makes it hard for the bottom quarter of the pupils to enter the system of vocational education.

Pupil flows

There are several entry points to secondary education today: after grade 4, grade 6, and grade 8 (at the ages of 10, 12, and 14)[3]. The organisation of *entrance examinations* by the secondary schools – on local initiatives – has become a common practice of the past few years. Earlier it was only the specialised secondary schools that organised entrance examinations to select those pupils whom they thought the most able, then more and more secondary schools followed suit, in line with their enrolment strategy. According to a recent survey that covered 304 institutions, (*Liskó, 1996*) the secondary schools admit some three-thirds of those applying and reject one-fourth of them. The ratio of the admitted as compared to the rejected has improved a little due to demographic decline (from 72.8% to 75.3%). However, the order of admittance chances among the types of the secondary institutions has not changed. Selection is strongest at the new-structure gymnasia, there are more or less equal chances for admittance to the traditional gymnasia and the secondary vocational schools, and admittance is easiest to the technical schools (*see Figure 10*).

Figure 10
Changes in the percentages of students admitted in upper secondary education as proportion of all applicants, by school type, 1991–95



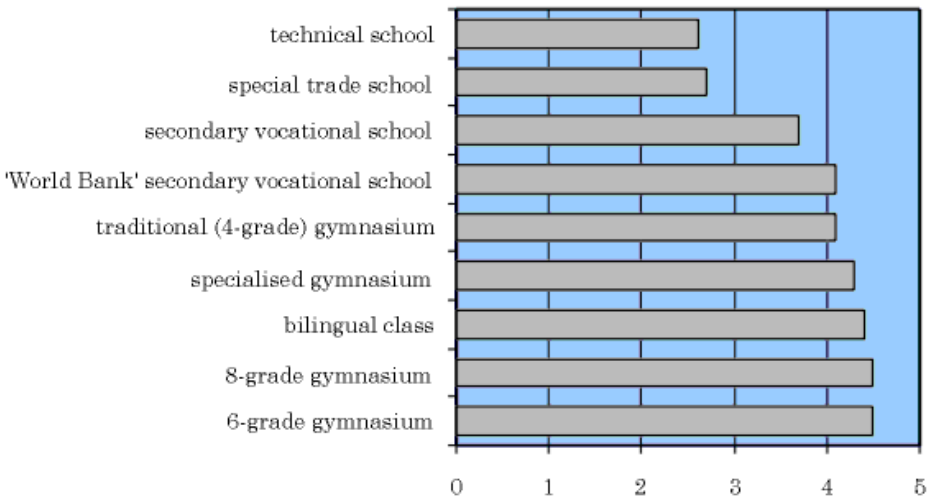
Source: Liskó, 1996.

The chances for admittance to the various school types depend greatly on the type of the educational branch and on the type of location of the school. The high-prestige, big city gymnasia have the highest number of applications among the *gymnasia* (10 times as many as they can admit), over-application is much lower (2-3-fold) in the lower prestige, 6 or 8-grade classes of the gymnasia in the smaller towns or in the

non-central districts of Budapest, and applications just meet the number of places available in case of the traditional (4-year) classes of the small-town gymnasia. The number of applicants for the *secondary vocational schools* mostly depends on the vocations being taught: over-application is highest (10-fold) in the secondary vocational schools that offer the most popular courses (tourism, hospitality, informatics), it is much lower at the schools of other tertiary-sector vocations (2-3-fold), and the number of applicants at schools that teach low-prestige trades hardly surpasses the number of places. At the *technical schools* the number of applicants has generally decreased but there are big differences here as well according to the trades on offer. The decrease is biggest in trades connected with the heavy industry, construction industry, machine industry, light industry and agriculture while there continues to be over-application for the trades of the tertiary sector (commerce, hospitality, service industry).

The differences between the chances for admittance are well reflected by the comparison of the pupils average educational achievement at the general school, which at the same time shows the hierarchy of the secondary schools, too. The 6 or 8-grade gymnasia and the dual language gymnasia are at the top: pupils need to achieve well over mark 4 in average to get in them (*see note to Figure 11*). Among vocational schools, the World Bank secondary vocational schools, even in smaller towns, are more sought after than the gymnasia, pupils with a mark 3 average cannot get into them either. A mark 3 average suffices for the traditional secondary vocational schools, and an achievement lower than that is only enough for the technical and the special trade schools (*see Figure 11*).

Figure 11
Average student attainment levels on entering secondary school, by school types



Source: Calculated data based on Liskó, 1996.

Note: Student attainment in Hungarian schools is marked 1 to 5: 1 is the lowest mark (fail), 5 is the best.

The rates of *drop-outs and repeaters* are important indicators in secondary education as well. But dropping out at this level, especially after the end of compulsory schooling, may have reasons other than in primary education. Dropping out may not only indicate that the students under-achieve or lack motivation but also that some outdated educational programmes are still running which students want to abandon. There are few career correction possibilities especially in the technical schools for skilled workers so the majority of drop-outs leave the school sensing the lack of prospects of their chosen trade.

Drop-out rates are lowest in the gymnasia and highest in the technical schools. But for the past few years the rates have decreased both in the secondary and in the technical schools. The rate of dropping-out during the school year has improved at the gymnasia (due to the selection procedures) but has further deteriorated in vocational training (*see Table 3*). In the secondary vocational schools and the technical schools dropping out is most common between grades 1 and 2, which shows that choosing a career at the age of 14 may not be well grounded. Partly because the pupils may not yet be mature enough, and partly because the parents and their children are almost completely left to themselves when making this choice. From grade 2 on mid-year dropping-out decreases.

Table 3
Mid-year drop-out rates in secondary schools, 1990/91–1995/96 (%)

	general secondary school	secondary vocational school	technical school

grade	I-II.	II-III.	III-IV.	I-II.	II-III.	III-IV.	I-II.	II-III.
1990/91	5.3	3.2	3.4	6.2	5.5	5.0	15.7	9.1
1991/92	3.3	2.7	3.4	6.3	5.1	4.6	16.2	8.4
1992/93	2.3	2.7	3.2	6.4	5.2	5.6	15.3	8.0
1993/94	3.0	2.5	3.7	6.8	2.8	4.5	15.8	6.8
1994/95	2.8	2.6	3.8	8.7	1.4	5.2	16.4	6.0
1995/96	2.2	2.1	3.1	6.5	1.1	4.3	16.1	4.5

Source: Szakképzés Magyarországon, 1997.

The number of those repeating a year at the secondary schools stagnated between 1993 and 1996, even decreased a little in 1996, but increased at the technical schools. This phenomenon also shows the "creaming-off" effect of secondary schools (*see Table 4*).

Table 4
Number and percentage of year-repeaters in secondary schools, by school type, 1993/94–1996/97

Academic year	general secondary school		secondary vocational school		technical school	
	number of repeaters	percentage of repeaters	number of repeaters	percentage of repeaters	number of repeaters	percentage of repeaters
1993/94	1879	1.4	4716	2.5	5545	3.2
1994/95	1992	1.4	5182	2.6	5958	3.6
1995/96	1916	1.4	5464	2.6	6028	3.9
1996/97	1784	1.3	5069	2.3	6070	4.2

Source: Ministry of Education, educational statistics.

The secondary school leaving examination. 73 thousand students passed their secondary school leaving examination in 1996. The number of those taking this examination has grown steadily for the past few years despite the decrease in the number of the age groups. All this means that secondary schooling in Hungary has become a level of mass schooling, which in turn has made the reconsideration of the

contents and functions of the school leaving examination necessary. *(See in more detail in Chapter D on Curricula, examinations and pupil attainment.)*

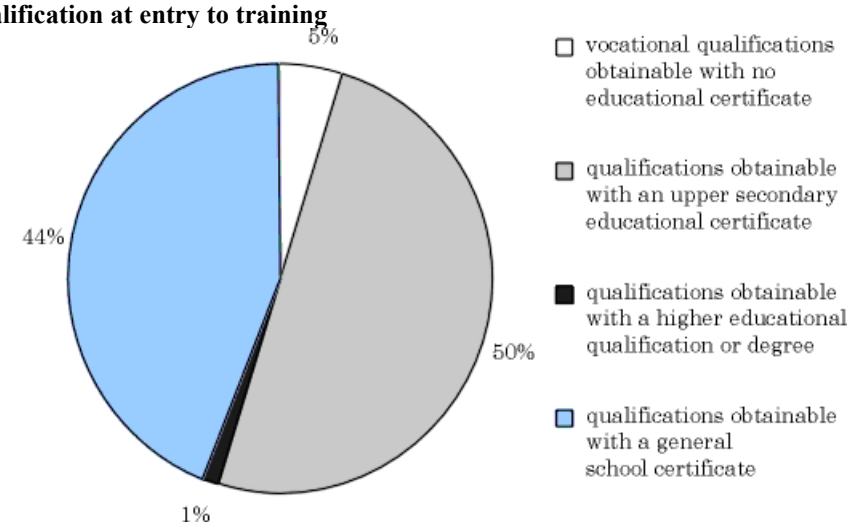
Table 5
Summative data of upper secondary school graduates, 1990, 1994, and 1996

	1990	1994	1996
general secondary school, full-time	24 136	31 029	32 133
general secondary school, total	27 241	34 413	..
secondary vocational school, full-time	28 903	37 575	41 280
secondary vocational school, total	40 633	45 788	..
full-time upper secondary education, total	53 039	68 604	73 413
obtained a secondary school leaving certificate, as proportion of all 18-year-olds	36.9	37.9	44.5
number of applicants to higher education	46 767	79 419	79 369
the admitted as percentage of all full-time graduates	31.7	43.4	52.3

Source: Pocketbook of Hungarian Statistics, 1996; Pre-disclosed educational statistics.

In *vocational education,* output control is the task of the National Training Register (OKJ), and of the vocational examinations organised in accordance with the OKJ. The Register lists the completion of five possible levels of schooling as entry points into vocational education. With most vocations this level is the secondary school leaving certificate (examination), and very few vocations are connected to the fundamental knowledge examination. Almost half of the vocational qualifications can be obtained after having the secondary qualifications, and almost half after the basic qualifications (*see Figure 12*).

Figure 12
Breakdown of the vocational qualifications listed in the National Training Register by the required qualification at entry to training



Source: Degéné, 1997.

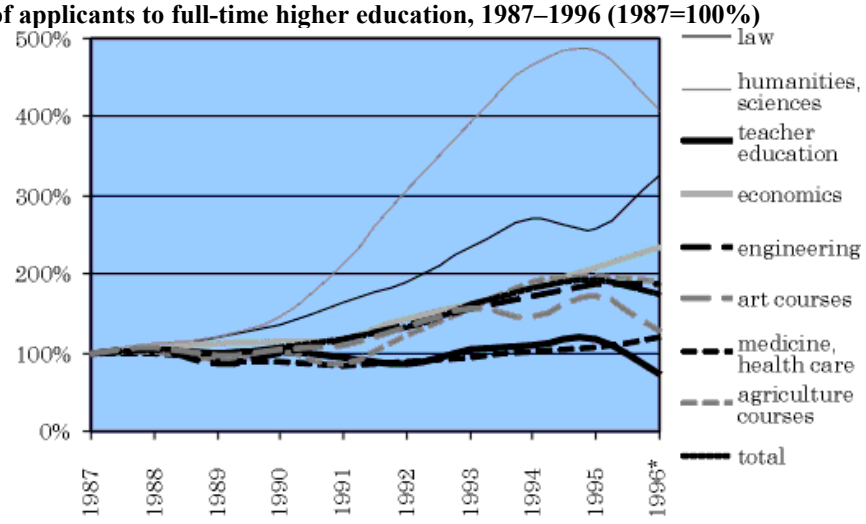
Continuing studies after secondary education. Progress from secondary education is determined by the rules of entry to higher education. As opposed to earlier when entry to higher education was only via an entrance examination more than half of the higher educational institutions today do not admit their students on the basis of an entrance examination but take a combination of their achievement at the secondary school and the results of their secondary school leaving examinations (or count these two as well). But this practice is usually a characteristic of institutions that have fewer applicants. A significant change can be expected from the new regulations of the school-leaving examinations when they come into force, since – according to the ruling of the Public Education Act – students may not be required to take a written entrance examination in the subject in which they had passed an advanced-level school-leaving exam in the same year[4]. *(See in more detail in Chapter D on Curricula, examinations and pupil attainment.)*

One of the most innovative developments of the past few years in the educational scene of Hungary, but also the one most under-researched, is the expansion and differentiation of the forms of education after the secondary level. The traditional higher educational sector, the universities and the colleges are themselves undergoing transformation but there has appeared a new institutional sphere, post-secondary education, which receives an ever increasing number of secondary school leavers. The

growing number of secondary school leavers generates a demand in higher education and induces its expansion. At the middle of the 1990s the rate of those entering higher education were some 55-60% of those with secondary qualifications, while the corresponding rate used to be 36-42% a decade before. In other words, every fourth 17-18-year-old youth continue their studies in higher education today, which surpasses the former 13-15% by far.

The number of students applying for higher education rose steadily until 1995. The yearly growth rate between 1990 and 1994 was more than 10%. The rate of growth has slowed since 1993, and for the first time in 1996 the number of students applying decreased, too, almost by 9% of the former year. The increase was not the same in all fields: it was strongest in law, economics, and college-level medicine. There was no change in the engineering field of higher education, and there was a little decrease in the agricultural fields. The number of applicants decreased by 35-40% in the teacher education institutes, by 27% in the art academies, and by some 15% in the faculties of humanities and natural sciences (*see Figure 13*).

Figure 13
Percentage of applicants to full-time higher education, 1987–1996 (1987=100%)



Source: Neuwirth, 1997.

Two-thirds of those entering higher education come from a general secondary school, the gymnasium, and one-third from secondary vocational schools. Despite the fact that the number of secondary school students rose faster than that of the gymnasium students, the number of students from secondary vocational schools did

not increase in higher education between 1995 and 1997. All in all, the chances for admittance improved a little both for the gymnasium students and the secondary vocational school students but the difference between the chances offered by the two different school types has hardly diminished. If we take all students who pass the secondary school leaving examinations and not only the ones who apply for higher education we can see how significant the difference is between students progressing into higher education from the different school types. In 1996 36.5% of the gymnasium leavers, 20% of students leaving a mixed-profile school, and only 14.5% of those leaving a secondary vocational school got into higher education in the same year when they left secondary school.

1.4. Post-secondary education

Post-secondary education is a widespread form of education with a vocational direction after secondary education but it does not yet operate as a coherent institutional system in Hungary. We are in the first phase of organising this form into a system. This process is naturally characterised by professional debates and heated conflicts of interest, and by the mixture of models envisaged. Even the exact definition of the term is problematic as there is not yet a name in the Hungarian language for this type of postsecondary or semi-higher educational training. It involves secondary vocational education, higher education and labour-force training, and all three of these sectors are interested in its regulation and in the expansion of its supply. If we take a salient feature of post-secondary education, which is the type of vocational education following the secondary level, then it has been in existence in Hungarian vocational education for decades in the form of the training of technicians. There are large numbers of youths with a secondary school leaving examination or with a secondary vocational qualification in post-secondary vocational education today organised by the market sector, or by the educational provision for first-time job-seekers.

The size of the demand can be estimated by the number of youths who have taken the secondary school leaving examination but have not been able to get into higher education. There are tens of thousands of such young people every year. Those with a general secondary school leaving certificate appear unqualified at the labour market

and their chances for employment are more limited. But there is a labour market demand for them in information technologies, communications and other fields of related services, the jobs in which are not fully covered – due to fast changes – with the official system of occupations. Some of these young people as first-time job-seekers are entitled to further education financed by the state and carry on with their studies in the system of labour force training or in secondary vocational education. School-leavers of the secondary vocational schools get into higher education in more limited numbers but many of them enter a form of full-time vocational education which requires the school leaving examination (*see Table 6*).

Table 6
Data on secondary-level vocational training based on a secondary school leaving certificate, 1996/97

	industrial	agricultural	other	total	change compared to 1995 (%)
number of students	12 899	2 291	24 878	40 068	127
of which full-time	11 793	2 255	19 223	33 271	138
passed the technicians' examination (in 1996)	8 806	2 169	623	11 598	112
of which full-time	8 119	2 115	579	10 813	106

Source: Pocketbook of Hungarian Statistics, 1996.

An important share of post-secondary education is organised within higher education. These courses at the moment cannot be considered an integral part of traditional higher education, they are very varied, have sprung up spontaneously and not on the initiative of the central government. Perhaps this is why this unregulated form of training can flexibly follow the labour force demands which may arise at the local level and may not be covered by the vocations listed in the official register. Due to the lack of, or the shortcomings of, the current legislation there have been delays in the launching of accredited post-secondary courses in higher education. The number of students attending post-secondary courses in higher education has reached 20-25% of all traditional higher educational students. Most of these programmes charge high fees, close to the ones charged by the training market.

1.5. Higher education

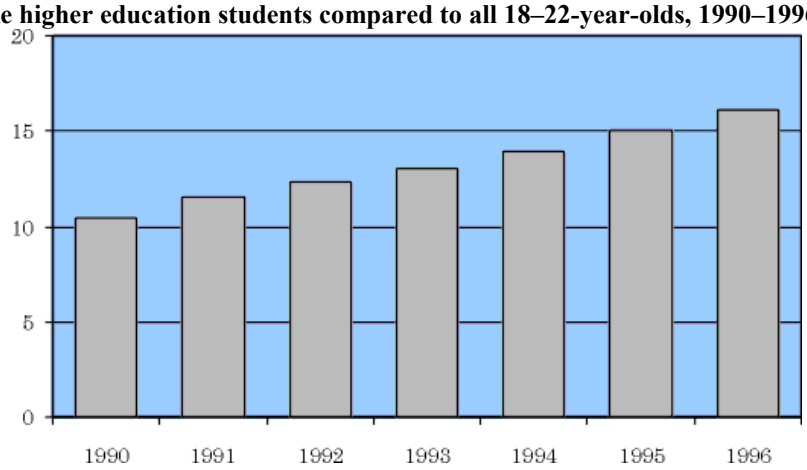
In 1995/96 there were 90 higher educational institutions operating in Hungary, 30 with a university rank and 60 colleges. 58 institutions were maintained by the state, 28 by the churches, and 4 by foundations. The number of students in higher education rose from 77 thousand to 142 thousand between 1990/91 and 1996/97, and within them the number of first-year students almost doubled, rose from 23 thousand to 45 thousand (*see Table 7*). As a consequence, the proportion of 18-22-year-olds in higher education increased from 10.4% to 16.4% between 1990 and 1996 (*see Figure 14*).

Table 7
Basic data on higher educational institutions, 1990/91–1996/97

	1990/91	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97
number of institutions	77	91	91	90	89
number of students	76 601	103 713	116 370	129 541	141 871
of which university	39 510	52 324	56 539	61 169	70 583
non-university	37 091	51 389	59 831	68 372	71 288
first-year student	22 662	35 005	37 934	42 433	44 595
female (%)	48.8	51.9	51.1	52	52.1
resident in student hostel (%)	46.8	39.8	36.7	33.5	32.2
number of lecturers	17 302	18 687	19 103	18 098	19 426
graduated	15 963	16 223	18 041	20 024	22 129
graduates as proportion of all 22-year-olds	10.9	11.6	12.6	13.3	13.7

Source: Pre-disclosed educational statistics.

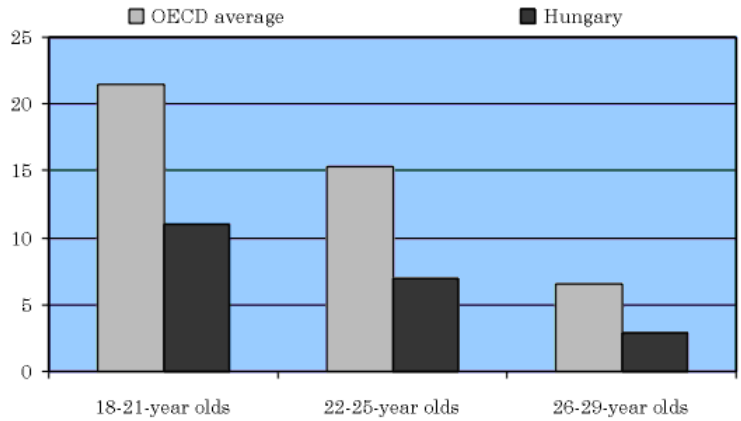
Figure 14
Rate of full-time higher education students compared to all 18–22-year-olds, 1990–1996 (%)



Source: Public and higher education. Central Statistical Office.

It is worth noting, however, that according to the official statistics the rate of students in higher education in Hungary remains much below the corresponding indicators of the developed countries (*see Figure 15*). The picture would be modified by the system of short-term, post-secondary vocational education (*see the section on post-secondary education above*) but this field is not yet reflected in the statistical data of higher education.

Figure 15
Percentage of youth in higher education in the developed countries and in Hungary, by age group, 1994 (%)



Source: Education at a Glance, 1996.

As a result of the expansion more than 20 thousand people acquired a higher educational degree or diploma in 1996/97, most of them at the non-university college level. This number expresses a 38% rise as compared to 1990. The biggest proportion

of the graduates are comprised of teachers and primary teachers. It is important to point out that the rise in student numbers brought about the deterioration of some important quality indicators: the number of full-time students per one lecturer, for example, rose from 4.4 to 9.46 between 1990 and 1996.

Before the change of the political regime the number of students to be admitted were centrally prescribed for every higher educational institution and course. This practice has been ceased completely. But the government continues to play a decisive role in setting the total number of students when using the indirect means of setting the numbers by way of financing. Following the recommendations of the Higher Educational and Scientific Council and the approval of the Parliament the government guarantees the central budgetary support (the per capita grant) for a set number of students. The sizes of the grants differ according to the educational field and level, and labour market analyses and prognoses are taken into consideration when they are calculated. The institutions are free to admit more students than determined centrally but in that case they have less money per one student. This is the reason why the higher educational institutions have a stake in expanding the fee-paying, shorter types of education (which, at the same time, is in accordance with the objectives of the government and with the European trends of development).

The development of higher education in the past few years can be characterised – beside the growth of the supply – by another trend already mentioned before: the supply is becoming more differentiated. The diversification of higher education has continued from other aspects as well. Within the institutional infrastructure there are institutions that are more open, that admit 40-60% of those applying, and there is a more closed circle, which admits 20-40% of the applicants. Universities and colleges of engineering, the agricultural universities, the colleges of economics, the faculties of natural sciences, and the colleges of kindergarten and primary teachers belong to the former, while the latter circle includes mostly universities, from the art academies to the law faculties.

1.6. Special education

In Hungary the education of disabled children, or children with special educational needs, is provided by an independent sub-system within public education. But it is a spreading practice with many schools to nurture and teach children with special educational needs integrated into ordinary classrooms.

The Public Education Act allows the use of more time than the average for the education of children with special needs. This means an extra 10% of time for the mildly and moderately handicapped but it may reach 40-50% in case of severe sensory handicaps. The maintainers of institutions for children and pupils with special needs receive a higher normative grant than the average, which is currently 103,000 HUF per child. This support is granted irrespective of whether provision is given in a special institution (branch, class), or in an integrated form.

Early development, transfers, counselling services. The Public Education rules that severely handicapped children, who cannot take part in regular schooling, have to receive early development from the age of 5. From 1997 the normative grant for children taking part in early development and care is 90,000 HUF. In some big cities early development is carried out in special development centres, elsewhere it is organised by experts or rehabilitation committees. In 1995 there were 199 such centres, where 340 teachers of special education carried out the early development of 2077 disabled children, of whom 30% were under 3 years of age. Following the adoption of the Public Education Act the development and counselling *services* and their institutional infrastructure not only stabilised but have been further developed. In 1995/96 some 3.5% of kindergarten and primary school children consulted an educational counsellor, and speech therapists worked with 2.8% of them.

The institutions of special education. In 1996 there were some 49,000 children and young people with special educational needs for the state to provide kindergarten and school education for. The public educational provision of severely handicapped children who are reared in their families is the task of experts and rehabilitation committees. If these children are raised in institutions of social care their education is carried out there. According to the data of January 1996 there were 1461 such severely disabled children who received obligatory developmental education. From

1996 on the same normative grant is due for the developmental education of severely handicapped children as for kindergarten or primary school education.

In 1996/97 there were 669 public educational institutions that took part in the education of pupils with special needs. 200 of them were independent special schools (special general schools and multiple-purpose institutions comprising of a kindergarten, a general school, a student hostel and a special trade school). There was a special education branch or class in 469 general schools. 656 of the institutions were maintained by a local government (settlement government: 573, county government: 83), 7 were maintained by a foundation, 4 by a church, 1 by the state and 1 by another maintainer. In national average 3.57% of all general school pupils (some 36,000) attend a special school. The mainstream general schools provided integrated education for 1928 pupils with special needs.

One of the important measures to help the integrated kindergarten and school education of children with special needs is that when determining the number of pupils in a kindergarten group or a school class, mildly mentally handicapped and speech impaired children have to be counted as two pupils, and children with a physical, a sensory or a moderate mental handicap, and autistic children, have to be counted as three pupils. The groups or classes that undertake the education of children with special needs can be formed with lower numbers of pupils than is prescribed for able children.

Secondary education. In the school year of 1996/97 564 students with special needs took part in integrated education in the mainstream secondary schools (gymnasia, secondary vocational schools, other vocational schools). There were 172 such students in the gymnasia, 233 in the secondary vocational schools, 59 in the technical and trade schools, and 28 private students in all the secondary schools. The Public Education Act rules that special trade schools may be organised for students with special educational needs. These schools may prepare for a vocational examination in two years of vocational education at most and may teach skills that are necessary for students to start their independent lives. In the latter case, the education may be twice as long as it is determined for the given trade in the National Training Register. In 1996/97 there were 4607 students with a mild mental handicap or with multiple disabilities learning in the special trade schools. The number of students with

a moderate mental handicap in the special schools of employment preparation and skills development was 765.

Teachers. In the school year of 1996/97 there were 6517 teachers teaching disabled pupils in the schools of special education, 63% of whom had a teaching qualification in special education. There is an independent teacher education institute for special education, the Gusztáv Bárczi College of Special Teacher Education.

1.7. The education of the national and ethnic minorities

The regulation of minority education. The regulatory frameworks of minority education in Hungary today are laid down in the 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act of 1993, the National Core Curriculum adopted in 1995, and the guidelines of the kindergarten and school education of the national and ethnic minorities issued by the Ministry of Culture and Education. The objectives of these documents are to harmonise the regulations of the minority legislation, the LXXVII Act of 1993 on the rights of the national and ethnic minorities, with the educational regulations, to expand the system of preferences concerning the minorities, and to adjust minority education to the new elements of content regulation in school education.

The Public Education Act assures the right for the members of a minority to be educated in their mother tongue and prohibits any form of exclusion or negative discrimination of these persons. According to the Act it is the right of the parents to decide what kind of kindergarten or school education they choose for their children.

The organisation of minority education – similarly to mainstream education – is the task of the local governments. The institutions of minority education do not constitute a separate, autonomous system of institutions. Though the 1993 Act on the rights of the minorities allows the *minority local governments* to found and maintain a school, there has not been a single school like this founded. According to the legislation, the minorities have the right to ask for information, to initiate measures, to make proposals, and to file in an appeal against a practice or decision that infringes minority rights. They have a *right of agreement* in decisions about the education of minorities, i.e. the school-maintaining local governments cannot make a legally valid

decision without an advance agreement with the minorities concerned. The minority local governments may also delegate members to the school boards to be able to influence the operation of the educational institutions, and they can take part in the institutions professional control.

The Public Education Act created the National Committee of the Minorities, which is a counselling body, and takes part in the preparation of the Minister of Education's decisions concerning the education of the minorities. The members of the Committee are delegated by the national minority governments, and its legal status equals that of the National Public Education Council (*see OKNT in Chapter B on Educational policy, the administration and financing of education).*

The National Core Curriculum (NCC) devotes a separate section to the basic principles of minority education. The NCC recognises intercultural education as a minority education programme, it makes the education of the Gypsy children equal that of the national minorities from linguistic and contents aspects, and makes the teaching of minority ethnography compulsory in the case of five minority education programmes.

The institutions of minority education

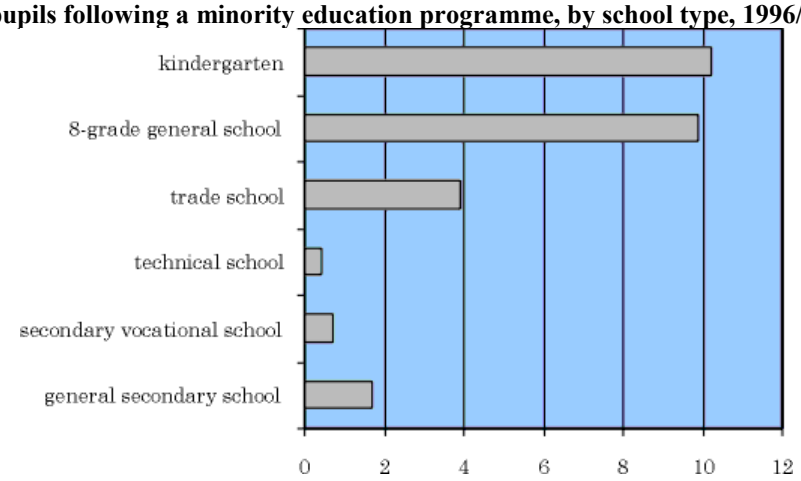
Kindergartens. Two-thirds of all national minority kindergartens are of a pure nationality character. The proportion of kindergartens that educate Gypsy children only is much smaller partly because there are no pedagogical reasons to segregate Gypsy children when there are no Gypsy language programmes, and partly because the proportion of Gypsy children attending a kindergarten is much lower. The number of children educated according to a minority kindergarten programme almost doubled between 1980 and 1995 but much of this growth has been produced by the German kindergartens. The number of children taking part in a German language programme grew from 57% to 71% in the same period. But in the school year of 1995/96 the number of children belonging to the major national minorities increased, except for Romanian children. Since 1993/94 the educational statistics do not gather data on the number of Gypsy children. According to the data of financing and to the estimates of the children taking part in national minority kindergarten programmes, there are about 15 thousand children taking part in a kindergarten programme for Gypsy children.

General school education. The education of pupils belonging to a national minority usually takes place in a common general school but in a separate study group or class. The education of Gypsy children is mostly integrated but a lot of schools organise separate Gypsy classes. Due to the lack of dual language programmes these separate classes are considered segregated education by analysts. The growth rate of children belonging to the major national minority groups halted in the middle of the 1990s. Within this the number of German and Romanian pupils has grown for the past few years, the number of Serbs stagnated, and the number of Croatian, Slovakian and Slovenian pupils has decreased. According to the estimates based on the data of financing *less than half* of the Gypsy pupils take part in Gypsy minority education programmes. We have no data on the number of pupils belonging to the smaller minority groups who attend auxiliary education in Sunday schools, outside the regular school system. The number of teachers teaching in minority education programmes is increasing, slowly but steadily, and to a greater extent than the number of minority children.

Secondary education. The development of the network of national minority gymnasia was completed with the division of the Serbo-Croatian gymnasium, with the opening of the German education centre in Baja, and with the completed building of the German student hostel in Budapest. Currently national minority education programmes are followed at ten independent gymnasia and at further ten gymnasia with a national minority branch. The Ghandi Gymnasium and Student Hostel in Pécs provides secondary education for Gypsy students.

Programmes. A problem related to the new content regulations is that the minority education programmes are not complete. The mother tongue programmes of minority children usually come to an end when the pupils leave the general school, and for a majority of pupils it will not be possible to prepare for the basic knowledge examination in their minority language as the number of students taking part in minority education is much lower at the further levels of schooling than in the kindergartens and general schools (*see Figure 16*).

Figure 16
Percentage of pupils following a minority education programme, by school type, 1996/97



Source: Data of the Ministry of Finance.

The modernisation initiatives and experimental programmes characteristic of the public education system in the 1980s and 1990s practically did not extend to minority education. The education of minority children today is still mostly based on curricula developed in the 1970s. At present there are four basic types of minority education programmes followed at the general and secondary levels of schooling: teaching the minority language, dual language education, education in the mother tongue, and remedial education for Gypsy pupils. Among the schools offering minority education the language teaching programme is the most common: 6% of the general schools teach in the mother tongue, 13% run a dual language programme, and 81% teach a minority language. According to a 1995 survey of 900 general schools where there was a sizeable proportion of Gypsy pupils 433 of these schools ran a remedial programme for Gypsy pupils. More than half of these programmes aimed only at the revision of the learnt subjects, the rest at revision combined with skills development or partial ethnographic studies, and only a very few were devoted to pure skills development.

Special problems concerning the education of Gypsy pupils

The biggest linguistic minority in Hungary is the Gypsies, who speak the Gypsy language or the Romanian language (the Boyas dialect). Despite this fact there is practically no general school running a Gypsy language programme. The general aim of the programmes organised for the Gypsy children is to make them “educable” in the linguistic sense of the term.

The education of the Gypsy children is a complex matter extending much beyond the narrow interpretation of minority education. Partly because this education, besides conveying the minority language and cultural contents, has to bridge very significant cultural differences, and partly because it has to alleviate a vast disparity between the educational levels of the majority population and the Gypsy population (*see Table 8*). For all these reasons the problematic of educating the Gypsy population cannot be narrowed down to the question of Gypsy education programmes.

Table 8
The educational qualifications of the Gypsy population, by age group, 1993 (%)

age	grade 0	1-7 grades	grade 8	trade school or technical school	general or vocational secondary school	college or university	total
14–19	1.5	32.4	55.3	10.4	0.4	0.0	100
20–29	1.7	22.4	59.7	14.5	1.7	0.0	100
30–39	4.6	32.5	47.4	12.5	2.5	0.3	100
40–49	10.1	39.7	40.8	7.4	1.4	0.6	100
50–59	32.0	42.3	20.5	3.7	1.4	0.2	100
60–69	39.6	51.2	6.4	2.1	0.4	0.4	100
70–	50.9	40.2	7.8	1.0	0.0	0,0	100

Source: Kemény, 1996.

The financing of minority education. The financing of minority education is a multi-channel system where the elements of normative financing mix with the elements of the separate financing of minority programmes. The 1997 budget contained an item of 3.2 billion HUF to supplement the normative financing of minority education, which was 173% of the grant given in 1994. The proportion of the supplementary minority grants within the total budgetary expenditure for education – except for a slight decrease – practically remained unchanged. Programme financing plays a very important role in the operation and development of minority education programmes. A smaller part of these resources is a separate item in the budget of the Ministry of Education, which serves the purpose of the execution of developmental minority education programmes, and the bigger part is channelled into a fund which the various public and private foundations can apply for. The most important ones of such foundations are the Public Foundation for the National and Ethnic Minorities,

the Scholarship Scheme operated by the Soros Foundation, and the Romani Educational Developmental Programme of the Soros Foundation.

2. The education of underachievers and of people returning to education; adult education

According to cautious estimates the number of people taking part in the various forms of adult education amounts to several hundred thousand. These kinds of training programmes attract a growing number of young people who have not yet entered the labour market, who are no longer students but have not yet become employed either. Adult education increasingly serves the underachievers and the drop-outs of the public education system as an opportunity for remedial education. Besides a new interpretation of the old term, adult education, the concept of *life long learning* is receiving more and more attention in the terminology of adult education. This phenomenon is the accompaniment of the expansion and diversification of the training forms that follow regular schooling and of the explosive growth of demands for such forms of training. The strongest motivation for participation in adult education is related with employment or rather, with unemployment. (This motivation develops as a result of unemployment or aims at preventing such a condition.)

School-based adult education. The original function of school-based adult education was to provide an opportunity for adults with low or incomplete levels of schooling to obtain qualifications (at a more mature age, and parallel with working). However, adult education has undergone a significant development in the past fifteen years: from the schools of workers the institutions have become the alternative institutions of the education of young people. In accordance with the levels of the regular school system the institutions of adult education operate at three levels: at the general, the secondary and the higher educational levels. Adult education may take the general or the vocational direction. Basically there are evening classes and corresponding classes (but the organisation of the training is usually more flexible than this). (*For the collective data see Table 9*.)

Table 9
Number of adults in school-based education by age, 1995/96

	8-grade general school for adults	upper secondary school for adults	university	total
15-year-old	556	488		1 044
16-year-old	1122	1 765		2 887
17-year-old	1343	7 874		9 217
15-17 year old	3021	10 127		13 148
18-year-old	673	11 881	1 045	13 599
19-year-old	391	11 444	2 260	14 095
20-year-old		9 840	2 939	12 779
21-year-old	124	7 152	3 470	10 746
22-year-old		4 902	3 469	8 371
18-22 year old	1188	45 219	13 183	59 590
23-year-old and over	996	20 545	36 841	58 382
Total	5205	75 891	50 024	131 120

Source: Szakképzés Magyarországon, 1996.

Labour-market training. Besides the school-based forms of adult education, the importance of the so-called labour-market training has grown considerably in the past few years. Though these forms of training are not part of public education, they deserve some special attention as their development has an impact on public education as well. This training sector operates within *the organisational structure of labour affairs,* which has been developed by the state. Another important segment of this form of training serves the maintenance and development of *the active labour force* in forms of studying beside work, training on the work-site, and in-service training.

The training within the organisational structure of labour affairs serves the training of the temporarily inactive population. In 1995 6.7-7.6% of the unemployed took part in such training. There are some remedial and rehabilitative forms of training within this organisational structure, too. The organisational hubs of this sphere of training are the regional centres of labour force development and training. These centres came into being with the help of the Human Resources Development

programme sponsored by the World Bank, and they appear as a new type of institution with a lot of additional capacity in the structure of training in Hungary. These centres organised the training of 94 thousand people in 1994, 71 thousand in 1995, and 69 thousand in 1996. The development of the choice of courses is strongly influenced by the preference of training with low demands for equipment or training in groups. This partly explains why this training system mostly targets people with higher qualifications. But there are courses organised in this system for target groups in special situations which are not much sought by the market sector (uneducated people, Gypsies, and people with reduced working abilities).

One-fifth of the participants of these courses have lower than the general school qualifications, though the proportion of such people among all unemployed is much higher, between 40 and 44%. The presence of youths in this sector is significant, similar to the rates in school-based adult education. The proportion of youths under 24 years of age in this form of training is high (42-44%) though their proportion among all the unemployed is lower, 23-27%. The participation of first job-seekers is also significant, the regional variation of their rates is between 34 and 37%. The average length of the training courses is 4 to 6 months. 80% of the courses aim at the acquisition of a vocational qualification. The majority of participants in the employment-oriented courses are unemployed but the regional training centres have registered a slow increase of people in employment. The proportion of the unemployed taking part in the courses of the regional training centres was 67% in 1994, 47% in 1995, but only 30% in 1996.

Training the active labour force. The necessity to deal with the determinant phenomenon of the 1990s, mass unemployment, and the social problems stemming from this, resulted in the development that in labour force training the attention has focused on training the inactive groups. The current regulations and financing systems motivate to a much lesser extent the training of the active employees whose individual choice is to study. According to the earlier regulations participation in schoolbased adult education is supported (for example, a study leave can be granted if there is a contract made with the employer) but these regulations do no cover participation in the professional in-service training courses or non-school based forms education which are initiated by the employees.

The structural reform of the economy, the appearance of the new technologies and occupations, and mass unemployment have created a quantitative demand in the field of in-service training and re-training. As a result a *training market* has developed, which has become fairly flexible by today and offers a manifold training supply. There are no reliable data available about the exact number of training institutions. An estimated number of some 2000 institutions deal with training on a more or less regular basis, with training as their main or minor profile. The National Statistical Data Collection Programme (OSAP), which operates as a result of a decree that rules about obligatory data provision, registered 4200 training courses, in which 105,000 people enrolled. (The numbers greatly overlap those in the training system of the unemployed.) There are a number of qualifications and types of training which are only offered by the training systems outside public education (these mostly satisfy the most up-to-date demands in the field of white-collar service activities).

There is no overall statistical information available on the training courses at the work-place either. According to surveys the largest volume of company training is the practical training of vocational school students, so much of the training expenses of the companies is devoted to this type of training. Some half of the companies with 10-100 employees receive vocational school students, and the bigger the company, the more likely it is to take part in practical training and the more students it is likely to receive. The average number of students received by companies is 90. Not counting the very small enterprises some half of the economic organisations organise their own training courses besides training vocational students. Companies with majority foreign ownership are usually more active in the organisation of internal training courses and are more reserved concerning the participation in the vocational education of students.

Chapter D

Curricula, examinations, and student attainment

1. The National Core Curriculum (NCC) and the local curricula

The Hungarian Parliament adopted the National Core Curriculum (NCC) in autumn 1995, which marked the introduction of a new system of educational content regulation. The implementation of the NCC, however, is taking place gradually and will take several years. If the new, national-level requirements and local curricula come into force in line with the schedule laid down in the law the new system will govern the whole of the school education system by the middle of the next decade. But it is obviously not the central documentation but what happens in the classrooms that can mark a real change. It is a well-known fact that curricular reforms need decades to have their effects felt because the transformation of the everyday practice in schools is a difficult and slow process, because the publication and distribution of new textbooks and teaching aids takes time, and the adaptation of teachers mentality to the new conditions is even more gradual. In the following sections we will introduce the new system of educational content regulation and will refer to the changes taking place at the level of the schools, too.

The reform of content regulation

The new framework of content regulation was laid down by the 1993 Public Education Act. The Act superseded the former, centrally issued curricular documents[1] and ruled that common educational content requirements would be determined for the end of the fourth, the sixth, the eighth, and the tenth grades by the curricular requirements of the *National Core Curriculum*. The Act changed the formerly one-level system of content regulation into a dual-level system by ruling that the educational work carried out in the schools should be governed by *school-level* or in other words, *local curricula.* The framework laid down in the 1993 Public Education Act was modified at certain important points by the amendments in 1995 and 1996 but the basic principles remained untouched. The NCC adopted in autumn 1995 lists *common requirements* for all pupils until the end of grade 10, irrespective of the type of school they attend. At the same time the regulations grant the schools great

freedom to adjust their local curricula to the knowledge levels and abilities of their pupils.

It is important to emphasise that the NCC, the most important document of content regulation, was not issued by the Minister responsible for the educational sector but by the *government*. This is a significant distinction because the changes induced by the NCC have an impact on all the other main authorities involved in public education and on the governmental sectors represented by them. The changes in normative financing in the 1996 and in the 1997 Budgetary Acts demonstrate the direct consequences the NCC brings about in financing, which cannot be handled without the Ministry of Finance, the portfolio in charge of the whole national budget. The introduction of the NCC influences the responsibilities of the local governmental maintainers, and through them the whole of public administration and the state support system of the local governments. Thus constant conciliation with the Ministry of the Interior is indispensable. Finally, the NCC greatly effects the system of vocational education because there has to be harmony between the models of content regulation followed in general education and the ones in vocational education. Due to this, a mutual decision had to be made with the Ministry of Labour, the ministry responsible for the area of vocational education. As far as the *adoption procedure* is concerned it was an important change that the NCC could only be put before the government when the *National Public Education Policy Council* (OKNT) and the *National Minorities Committee* had given their consent to the proposed document.

The section of the 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act dealing with content regulation – as opposed to the former regulations – introduced a new concept when using the term *pedagogical cycle* in education. There are three pedagogical cycles differentiated: kindergarten or pre-primary education, the foundation of general knowledge, and the preparation for the acquisition of a vocational qualification. The foundation of general knowledge cycle lasts from grade 1 to grade 12. The beginning of the third cycle, the preparation for a vocational qualification, is not determined by the law: its beginning may vary from school type to school type. Concerning the internal division of the 12 years of general education the 1996 Amendment did not supersede the 1993 Public Education Act, which said that the NCC should define the common and compulsory requirements for the ends of the fourth, the sixth, the eighth and the tenth grades. What was new in 1996, however, was that these requirements

were formulated according to ten comprehensive cultural domains or knowledge areas rather than for individual subjects. The cultural domains are the following: Mother Tongue and Literature; A Modern Foreign Language; Mathematics; Man and Society; Man and Nature; Our Earth and Environment; Art, Music, Drama; Information Science; Life Management and Practical Skills; Physical Education and Sports.

The section of the 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act dealing with content regulation deals with the question of the *examination system* in great detail. This Amendment ruled that the general requirements of the school leaving final examination should be published and should contain the common and compulsory requirements of education carried out in grades 11 and 12. This regulation in practice meant that a decision was passed about the "NCC" of the final cycle of secondary education. The Public Education Act's rulings about the pedagogical cycles and about the general requirements of the school leaving examination practically ensure the survival of all vertical structural models within the education system *(see in more detail in Chapter C on the education system and progress within the system)* and it is left to the regulatory force of the NCC to further formulate the vertical cycles.

Contents reform and vocational education

In vocational education the most important tool of content regulation besides the NCC is the *National Training Register* (OKJ). This document lists the vocations the education for which may be offered by the school system, and determines by vocation the level and length of training, the proportion of theoretical and practical training, and lays down the qualifications prerequisite to the commencement of training. The concrete requirements for the acquisition of a vocational qualification can be defined in accordance with the OKJ and these can in turn serve as the bases of the curricular programmes. The 1993 Act on Vocational Education ruled on the publication of the OKJ. It was first published in December 1993 and was modified in May 1995 and December 1996. The Register lists 933 qualifications (vocations). 650 can be acquired through education and training in the public education system, and 216 of these can *only* be acquired in school-based education. Concerning *the previous qualifications required* we have already pointed out (*in Chapter C on the education system and progress within the system)* that almost exactly half of all qualifications can be obtained after secondary qualifications, and half of them with basic educational

qualifications. As far as *the length of training* is concerned the majority (335) of the 650 qualifications obtainable in the school system require a two-year-long training. 64 vocations require longer time, and 251 require shorter training. The majority of the latter group, 176 vocations, require one-year-long training.

The introduction of the National Core Curriculum and adjusting the training in line with the National Training Register compels the majority of the institutions of vocational education to overhaul their educational contents. The vocational and examination requirements of the 650 OKJ qualifications obtainable in schools have been prepared by the relevant ministries and been issued as legal regulations. According to the law, however, a form of training can only be instigated in the schools when the central (curricular) programmes are ready and published. It was the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour to prepare the central programmes for the majority of the qualifications, for 343 out of the 650. By the end of October 1997 204 such programmes had been approved and altogether 332 had been submitted for approval.

The implementation of the National Core Curriculum

The introduction of the NCC and of the new system of content regulation in general has required completely different strategies in the decentralised environment of educational administration to the ones followed by traditional curricular reforms. The system of shared responsibilities determines the possible content and scope of action for the central government. The starting point for the central educational administration has to be the acknowledgement that the transformation of school education in Hungary largely depends on the local decision-makers, who enjoy great autonomy. The decision-makers at the central level recognise that the NCC can lead to positive changes only if the local governments, the schools, and the individual teachers play an active role in the process of implementation. The local governments have to strive for local and regional educational planning and for co-operation with other maintainers, the schools have to review their tasks and define them when negotiating with their maintainers, and the individual teachers have to be active in the realisation of the professional conception of their school they themselves have formulated.

Besides these factors it is inevitable that the central educational administration should play a leading role in the creation of the NCC's infrastructure: the provision of a proper choice of textbooks, curricula and teaching aids, the development and operation of a service system in charge of teachers in-service training, counselling, information technologies, etc. The National Institute of Public Education (OKI) was given a distinguished role in the implementation of the NCC (*see more details on OKI in Chapter E: School personnel and the system of auxiliary educational services).* In 1996 the following comprehensive tasks were allocated as the almost exclusive responsibilities of the OKI: the creation of the supply of curricula that would orient the preparation, the borrowing, or the development of the local curricula, and making the teachers acquainted with this supply of curricula. It was the task of the OKI to develop the standardised format of the curricula, then to identify the curriculum development workshops nation-wide and ask them to adjust their curricula to the standardised format. The OKI had to ensure that all schools have access to the central supply so that they could rely on them when starting the development of their own local documents.

The OKI decided to use the potential of, and to give a prominent role to, the tools of the modern information technologies in the development of the standardised format of the curricular supply, in the adjustment of the already existing curricula to this format, and in the dissemination of the prepared curricula, so *a computerised curricular databank* was created. The electronic editing and storing also made electronic dissemination possible. In order to disseminate curricula this way the OKI first organised a network of *service points* where schools and teachers could access the available curricula. The service points were evenly established in the various regions of the country because they were first housed by the county pedagogical institutes (*on the county pedagogical institutes see Chapter E: School personnel and the system of auxiliary educational services).* Later several schools volunteered to also serve as service points. Besides this network the curricular databank became directly accessible via the Internet, access to which was being installed in the individual schools.

The creation of the curricular supply and getting the curricula to the schools

Setting up the curricular databank started from the end of 1996. The OKI commissioned curriculum developers to develop either *individual curricula* to cover a particular cultural domain or school subject or *complete school curricula,* and to adjust them to the standardised format. There were also lectors asked to assess the curricula before adding them to the databank.[2]

In spring 1997, when the schools had to commence the development of their local curricula, the curricular supply was still rather modest. In the middle of March there were 2 complete school curricula, 13 curricula for a whole cultural domain, and – including the latter – 146 subject curricula in the databank. The preparation of complete school curricula lagged behind most though they were in greatest demand. The shortage of such curricula played an important role in contemplating at the beginning of 1997 whether the implementation of the NCC should be postponed. However, by October 1997 a number of complete and detailed school curricula were prepared and stored in the databank and the supply of subject curricula expanded considerably as well (*see Table 1*).

Table 1
Number of complete school curricula and subject curricula in the Curriculum Database, October 1997

	complete school curricula	subject curricula
complete general school curricula	9	160
general school curricula 'families'	20	88
unique general school curricula	–	79
vocational curricula for secondary vocational schools	13	67
general knowledge curricula for secondary vocational schools	–	31
total	42	425

Source: Curriculum Database.

Owing to the slow development of the curricular supply the Ministry of Culture and Education launched some new initiatives in spring 1997. The Ministry's

foundation for the support of innovations, the Public Foundation for the Modernisation of School Education (KOMA), called for the applications of schools involved in development to prepare complete school curricula and transitional curricula in the traditional way. The local curricula of the nineteen selected schools were distributed in printed form among the county pedagogical institutes, where the schools could have access to them, together with the rest of the recommended curricula, free-of-charge. The majority of these documents were prepared by schools that had taken part in the Self-Developing Schools programme of the Soros Foundation and had learnt the techniques of curriculum development for the local level. The model curricula had versions for school grades 1-6, 1-8, 1-10, 6-12, 9-10, and 9-12.

The creation of the curricular supply ran parallel with the development of the information service system for the sector of school education. Such services were provided for the schools by the county pedagogical institutes from 1995 on, when mostly application and fund-raising possibilities were disseminated. To be able to serve this purpose the pedagogical institutes were provided with computers and Internet access by the Soros Foundation. The National Institute of Public Education (OKI) came to an agreement with the Soros Foundation that these computer systems at the county pedagogical institutes would also serve as bases for the information offices of the public education system. The OKI – besides supplying information – covered the operational costs of these service points or information offices. During 1996 the number of the service points was enlarged. Several schools undertook to provide access to the curricular databank 20 hours a week – in given opening hours – for those interested and only at a cost price. So the number of service points rose to 41. The curricula were available on computer discs, on a special software that allowed standardisation, in a Word file, or in printed or photocopied form. Besides having access to the curricular databank the schools and the maintainers received a lot of useful information at these service points about the implementation of the NCC. In addition, the periodical Új Pedagógiai Szemle (New Pedagogical Review) regularly published short summaries of the new curricula in its appendix.

The direct reliance on the tools of modern informatics and telecommunications in a nation-wide curricular reform is a unique phenomenon by international comparison. This form provides the information and professional materials needed for the local

implementation of the reform for large numbers of users in a very cost-effective way. It also gives momentum to the use of informatics and network communication systems at the school level, the long-term impact of which is still hard to estimate. The curriculum development software allows the curricula to be of great variety but at the same time it ensures that they have a common base. It also helps the quality assurance of the curricula by establishing whether the unified criteria are met, such as the determination of educational objectives, a proper timing structure, the listing of applied textbooks and professional materials, and an overview of the teaching aids necessary for the realisation of the given curriculum. Applying up-to-date technology, however, brings about a lot of problems as well. One of the major concerns is that while the institutions and individuals who possess the technology have access to the necessary information and professional materials in the most effective way possible while those who do not are excluded from the processes. According to the surveys carried out teachers – especially primary teachers and teachers in rural schools – find the qualified curricula in the printed form more helpful than the electronic versions. One reason for this is highlighted by a survey carried out about the implementation of the NCC at the beginning of 1997, which revealed that 8.8% of the schools do not possess a computer and more than half of the institutional heads (50.7%) are not familiar with computers (*Vágó, 1997a*).

On the other hand there are serious professional questions to consider about the use of the modern tools and programmes of informatics when standardising the curricula. Behind every curriculum development software there is a learning and teaching philosophy which may limit the success of other approaches. Standardisation may exclude certain solutions that otherwise could prove viable in practice. Furthermore, some curriculum development workshops – not having accepted the standard criteria required by computerisation – could not join in the development of curricula, leading to a delay in its development. The curricula prepared in the traditional way and printed format following the KOMA applications mentioned above provided a good alternative in this respect as well.

The financial resources needed at the school-level for the development of the local curricula and for the preparation of the teachers were provided – as was mentioned in *Chapter B on Educational policy, the administration and financing of education* – by the central budget via direct applications during the course of 1997. In

the same year the Ministry of Culture and Education issued a number of publications to provide information about, and to popularise, the implementation of the NCC, and sponsored media programmes that served to inform parents, students and teachers. The educational weekly, entitled *Köznevelés,* regularly published *NAT-lap* (the NCC Bulletin) as a supplement, which contained concrete pieces of information and recommendations for teachers. An *NCC Calendar* was also published to inform the schools and the maintainers about the tasks and their scheduling during the implementation of the NCC and the preparation of the local curricula. A thematic issue of the newspaper of the local governments (ÖN-KOR-KÉP) was published to provide detailed information for the local representatives and civil servants about their tasks concerning the NCC. The Ministry also sponsored a lot of regional or county level seminars and conferences about the implementation.

The implementation of the NCC at the level of the schools

According to the Public Education Act schools have to follow their own NCC-compatible pedagogical programmes and local curricula three years after the adoption of the NCC, namely in 1998. However, to be able to do so the maintainers, at least in theory, had to be acquainted with these documents no later than the end of 1997, in order to plan their 1998 budget. Consequently, the preparations for the development of the local curricula started in most institutions at the beginning of 1997. Thus the direct impact of the NCC was felt at the level of the schools much earlier than the terms laid down in the law. According to the NCC survey of 1997 the majority of general school heads (57%) already felt at the beginning of 1997 that the contents of education were determined by the NCC. The corresponding rate among secondary school heads was much lower: two-thirds of them said that the NCC had not yet had an impact on educational contents (*Vágó, 1997a*). In a public opinion poll among teachers (*Liskó, 1997a*) in April 1997 49% of the teachers said that the local curricula were under preparation, and 3% said they were in place. 41% of the school heads asked in the NCC survey said they were working on the local curricula, whereas 10% said that they were ready with the first version, and another 10% said they had finished preparing their local curricula.

The success of the implementation of the NCC will basically depend on the preparation of the local curricula on time and their being of appropriate quality.

According to the 1997 NCC survey about one-third of the institutions had introduced some kind of innovation in the field of curricula before the NCC appeared. Thus, approximately this proportion of schools can be said to have some experience in local curriculum development or adaptation. This proportion was much lower in the case of the general schools (22%) than in the gymnasia (51%), and much more so in the secondary vocational schools (64%). Therefore, for most schools, the development of the local curricula meant a kind of task hardly ever encountered before. Despite this only a little more than one-fifth of them said at the beginning of 1997 that they would take ready-made, centrally recommended curricula, or borrow such curricula from other schools, without any local adaptation. The largest proportion, exactly two-thirds of all schools were planning to adapt curricula developed elsewhere to their own conditions. The proportion of schools planning to develop, and use exclusively, their own curricula amounted to some 11% (*see Table 2*). This is the estimated percentage of schools willing to engage in independent curriculum development.

Table 2
School heads on the expected source of their local curriculum, by type of school maintainer, 1997 (%)

	local government	association of local governments	county or Budapest government	church	foundation	university, college	total
centrally recommended	22.2	15.7	28.6	10.5	30		21.5
adopted from another school	0.2		2.0	2.7			0.4
adapted	66.7	79.5	53.1	68.4	20	71.4	66.8
home-made	10.8	4.8	14.3	18.4	50	28.6	11.3
number of schools (100%)	815	83	49	38	10	7	1002

Source: Vágó, 1997a.

The final versions of the local pedagogical programmes of the institutions of vocational education were scheduled to be prepared during the autumn and winter of 1997. The school heads of these institutions expected the biggest challenge to be over the ruling of the 1993 Public Education Act which said that vocational education

could not commence before the end of the tenth grade. This ruling may cause serious, though transitory, employment problems among teachers of theoretical subjects, but especially among teachers of practical training. In extreme cases some vocational teachers may not be allocated classes at all for two years. Some schools may remedy this transitory and critical situation by turning their attention to adult vocational education, to training masters of trade or technicians but others may solve the situation through redundancy or making their vocational teachers – especially those of less popular trades – take early retirement.

In the sections below two important areas of the schools current work are going to be introduced in more detail.

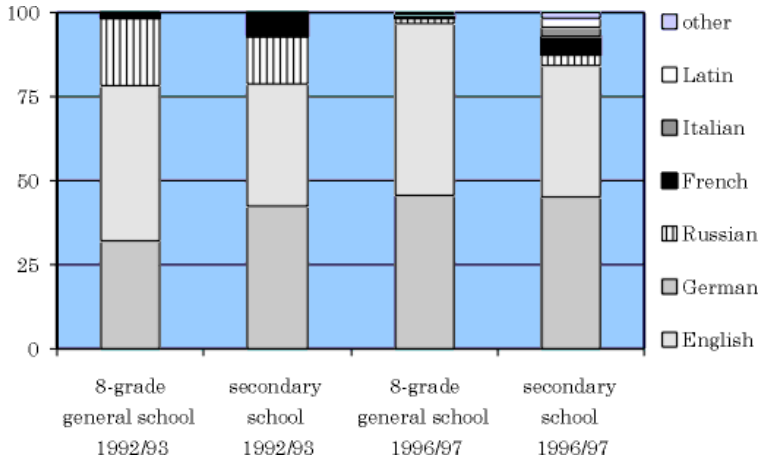
Teaching foreign languages

Opposition to compulsory Russian language during the forty years of the Soviet bloc era, the closedness of the country, and the strong limitations on travel opportunities, used to hinder severely the development and strengthening of positive attitudes towards foreign language learning. There was no real motivation for students to learn foreign languages, nor for adults, because the acquired language skills were not much appreciated by the then Hungarian society. It is not surprising then that the foreign language knowledge of the adult Hungarian population is at a very low level. According to data published in the mid-1990s in 1994 32% of the Hungarian citizens older than 14 years of age could speak another language beside Hungarian. 11% knew two foreign languages and 3% knew three or more. Most of these people (17.3%) spoke German, followed by 11.5% English, 8.8% Russian and 2.2% French. Not counting people speaking a national minority language only 11.8% of people over 14 knew and used a foreign language at an *acceptable level*, 3.6% spoke two languages, and 0.8% spoke three or more. The past few years have seen an explosive growth in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. There is probably no other area in education to match the extent of development of this field.

In the school year of 1996/97 there were 668,819 pupils in the general schools learning a foreign language: 50.8% of them learnt English, 45.7% learnt German. At the general secondary school, the gymnasia, two languages are already taught in grade one (i.e. grade nine). At the secondary vocational schools two languages are rarely taught except for vocations that particularly require foreign language skills (tourism,

catering, etc.). The learning of foreign languages has increased in the past few years. While the number of secondary school pupils rose only by 1.6% between 1992/93 and 1996/97 the number of foreign language lessons taught rose by 14.7%. The number of foreign languages learnt per one pupil rose from 1.25 to 1.42. But it is not only the proportion devoted to the teaching of foreign languages that has increased, the structure of teaching has also changed. Since 1989 the number of pupils in the general schools learning the Russian language has decreased from 62% to below 2% while the number of those learning a Western European language has risen from 38% to 98%. The two major languages – German and English – with their combined proportion of 96.5% oust almost every other language. The leading position among the foreign languages is taken by the German language in the general schools and by the English language in the secondary schools (*see Figure 1*).

Figure 1
Percentages of pupils learning foreign languages in the 8-grade general schools and in secondary schools



Source: Calculations based on the educational statistics of the Ministry of Education. Note: Pupils learning several foreign languages count as several pupils in this figure.

The National Core Curriculum and the teaching of foreign languages. The NCC – compared to the 1978 central curriculum formerly in force – has determined a new time framework for the teaching of foreign languages, entailing two major changes. On the one hand, the beginning of foreign language learning has moved from grade 4 to grade 5. On the other hand, the academic timetable is determined in a flexible way: both more and fewer lessons can be devoted to the teaching of foreign languages (*see Table 3*).

Table 3
Number of annual timetable allocated to foreign languages at the 8-grade general school, by the 1978 Curriculum and by the National Core Curriculum

	grade 4	grade 5	grade 6	grade 7	grade 8	total
by the 1978 Curriculum	64	96	96	96	96	448
minimum annual timetable by the NCC		96	94	85.5	85.5	359
maximum annual timetable by the NCC		128	128	114	114	484

Source: Vágó, 1997b.

It is unknown at present what kind of decisions are reached within the schools, and between the schools and their maintainers, concerning the number of lessons devoted to foreign language teaching during the preparation of the schools local curricula and pedagogical programmes. Some analysts fear that the number of such lessons will diminish. Others argue that there is no real danger since – according to experiences gained so far – the pressure from parents will force the schools to allocate the maximum number of lessons to this cultural domain of the NCC. It is possible though that in the lower cycle of the general school the maintainers of rural schools will not be able to finance early foreign language teaching. Though compulsory foreign language learning today starts in grade 4 there are some one hundred thousand primary school pupils learning a foreign language already in the earlier grades. If – in accordance with the NCC – the teaching of foreign languages were started everywhere in grade 5 the number of primary school pupils learning a foreign language would decrease by two hundred thousand.

Informatics education

For the past few years the development of informatics education and the connecting of schools into the global telecommunication networks have been a high priority in the contents modernisation of school education. The Ministry of Culture and Education called for applications (called the Secondary Schools Internet Project) in spring 1997 to support the schools connection in the global computer networks. Within the framework of this informatics development programme each secondary school and independent secondary student hostel received a computer network together with full-scale Internet access.

The maintainers of the general schools could also apply for developmental funds but they were compelled to contribute to the planned development with their own share and they were only granted support if they had some informatics development conception formulated. The interest of the maintainers in this field was very high: all together they offered almost as large an amount (1.54 billion HUF) as the total of the centrally earmarked support for this purpose (1.6 billion HUF).

The development of informatics education is also supported by the central educational policy via teachers in-service training: 30-35% of the grants earmarked for inset are meant for training in the field of computer studies. The institutions that have volunteered to offer in-service training in this field and to follow the thematic guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education are forecast to train some 1000-1500 teachers within three years. It is not only universities and colleges that have volunteered but also secondary schools and pedagogical institutes as well, of which the latter will function all over the country as the reference centres for in-service training in informatics.

As far as the *use* of computers is concerned the supply of the tools of informatics at the disposal of teachers in schools is very poor, the market of informatics does not yet feel the pressure of demand. The teaching of foreign languages is the only field where there are a number of programmes to be used. However, the majority of teachers do not, or cannot, use them and most schools have difficulties when it comes to the purchase of these programmes. So in the everyday life of schools the use of computer technologies is very far from the potentials that lie in the spreading of these tools.

One of the main objectives of the informatics development programme is to integrate the separate local systems into a full-scale public education network, a special *intranet* system. This would help ensure the provision of various educational services for all teachers and schools. It could help spread the new methodologies of teaching the general knowledge subjects or could help access the documents that teachers could use when developing their own curricula, such as multi-media materials for topics to be dealt with in lessons. In order to develop the supply of these materials there were several calls for applications during the course of 1997 to develop materials which teachers can use when teaching their subjects or which

students can use to obtain and process the information they need when dealing with a study area.

Besides its direct use in the classrooms, informatics is expected to contribute to the modernisation of public education in other fields as well. For example, the *administration of public education* can be made more efficient (it can make school administration easier, it can assist in the solution of regional tasks or tasks connected with the realisation of the county development plans, it can help in the execution of local administrative tasks, such as the checking of compulsory schooling or assisting parents and students in the selection of a school). Informatics can greatly improve the *operation of public educational information services* (such as public educational statistics, the tasks of measuring and evaluation, informatics services in the field of examinations or career orientation). Informatics can also support the development of the *electronic market* in education (distance learning, professional in-service training, curriculum services, etc.).

The success of the developmental programmes in the field of informatics education largely depends on whether teachers and other actors in education fully realise the importance of information technologies. There is also a large stake in the development of teaching and learning multi-media materials – of a proper quantity and quality – from which teachers can choose according to their system of values.

2. The developing system of examinations

One of the most important elements of the reform of contents regulation in Hungary is the transformation of the system of examinations. Ever since the launching of the reform there has been a fairly high consensus that a much greater importance has to be given to output control and within this to examinations. The consensus has been much weaker among the various professional groups as to what type of examinations should be organised, at which points of the education system, and for which student groups. It was the 1993 Public Education Act that introduced the type of examination (the fundamental knowledge examination) that is to be taken at the end of grade 10 either at a general school or at a secondary school but only by those students who start their sixth grade studies in the school year following the publication of the examination requirements. Formerly there used to be only one type

of examination – except for the vocational examinations – in the Hungarian school system: the school-leaving final examinations at the end of (upper) secondary schooling. The legal regulations of the fundamental knowledge examination were formulated in June 1997, almost two years after the adoption of the National Core Curriculum. The reform of the school leaving examination was ruled about by the 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act and the related detailed regulations were also adopted in June 1997.

2.1. The new fundamental knowledge examination

The fundamental knowledge examination is an altogether novel element of the system of content regulation in Hungarian public education. It is a state examination that has to be taken according to nationally unified requirements based on the National Core Curriculum. Students may take this examination upon the completion of the requirements of their studies in grade ten. Taking the examination is *not compulsory* yet the schools are compelled to create the *possibility* of taking this exam if there is a demand for it. The examination certificate entitles the holder to enter the forms of vocational training that are laid down in the regulations and to engage in certain types of employment or activities.

There has been a great deal of debate accompanying the elaboration and the regulation of the fundamental knowledge examination. According to its opponents it is inadvisable to introduce an element of output control at a point where there is no strict division between two educational cycles in most schools. Another group of opponents argue that raising compulsory schooling to the age of 18 will lead to the 12-year-long schooling becoming general, which may make the examination placed at the current end of compulsory schooling superfluous. Its supporters on the other hand argue that the fundamental knowledge examination in itself will contribute to the extension of general schooling from the present 8 grades to 10 grades, and it will transform the tenth grade of studies into the completion phase of general basic education in accordance with the NCC even if almost all young people decide to continue with their studies – mainly in vocational education – after this grade.

The detailed conception of the fundamental knowledge examination was prepared in 1996 by a professional workshop, the Fundamental Knowledge Examination Centre, in Szeged after years of preparation. In the same year the general

requirements of the examination were also laid down by the subject committees appointed by the Centre and these requirements – similarly to the general conception of the examination – were also opened up to debate. The final version of the requirements of the examination was issued – at the same time with the Regulation of the School Leaving Examination – in a ministerial decree in May 1997.[3] The examination will be introduced from 2002 onwards. Any cultural domain of the NCC can become an *examination subject*. In order to obtain the certificate altogether six examinations have to be passed by those applying, three of which are compulsory subjects, and three are optional. The mode of the examination may be oral, written or practical.

It is important to mention that concerning the examination requirements the debate is being continued between those who represent the integrative approach of the NCC and those who favour the traditional subject approach. It is also disputed at what level the minimum requirements of the fundamental knowledge examination should be drawn. Some argue that the attainment of some proportion of the minimum requirements of the NCC should be sufficient since the examination will serve as an entry to vocations of lesser rank. Others say that the examination may soon become wide-spread so the requirements should be set with this in mind. The future of the fundamental knowledge examination will largely depend on the proportion of secondary students applying to take it and on the schools – if there are going to be any – that require the passing of this exam as a prerequisite for progress within the system.

2.2. The new regulations of the school leaving examination

As was indicated before, a greatly increased annual number of students had been taking the school leaving examination by the mid-1990s and, due to the continuous expansion of secondary schooling, the school leaving final examination can be expected to become generally taken in the future. Because of these developments the current character, role, content and function of the school leaving examination are under review these days. The school leaving examination is gradually *becoming a multi-function completion action* of secondary education fulfilling functions such as the output control of educational contents, the foundation for vocational education, preparation for higher educational studies, a selection filtering process for higher education, and a kind of "initiation ritual" on entering adult life.

The professional conception of the reform of the school leaving examination was elaborated by an expert committee commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and Education in spring 1995. The conception consisted of several possible variations but each of them emphasised that students should be granted a bigger choice of examination subjects and greater freedom in choosing from among them, and that examinations in the particular subjects should be organised at two levels (at the normal or intermediate level and at the advanced level). The reform also proposed that the vocational foundation subjects taught at the secondary vocational schools should also become electable examination subjects, and that a national level standardisation should be sought in the written parts of the examination. There were bigger differences among the proposal variations in the following respects: to what extent the preparations for the school leaving examination should determine the pedagogical organisation of the completion cycle of secondary education, and to what degree should students be given freedom when electing their examination subjects.

The strongest reactions in the ensuing public debate centred on the freedom of choice of subjects. The question whether the subject of history should remain a compulsory examination subject even led to a Parliamentary debate. A fairly large proportion of secondary schools expressed their doubts about the two levels of the examination. It required a longer period for both the professional and the general public to realise that the proposal was for the two levels of the individual subjects and not for the examination as a whole. It was also the reform of school leaving examination that provoked the most debates before the amendment of the public education act in 1996.

The Regulation of the school leaving examination was adopted by the government in June 1997. The first examinations that reflect the new regulations are going to be organised in 2004. The Regulation will have a direct controlling impact on the completion cycle of secondary education in 2002 but its influence will be felt much before, during the preparation of the schools pedagogical programmes and local curricula. The most important elements of the new regulation are the following. The new school leaving examination will have two levels, i.e. the examinations in the individual subjects can be taken either at the intermediate or at the advanced level. There will be five compulsory examination subjects to be passed at least at the intermediate level. Four of these subjects are determined by the Regulation, the fifth

is an electable subject. The compulsory subjects are: Hungarian language and literature, history, mathematics, and a foreign language. In minority education examination in the mother tongue and literature is also compulsory. The Regulation also lays down the most important rules of taking the examination. The *general requirements* of the individual examination subjects have been published as an appendix to the Regulation. They describe in detail what attainment targets the students have to reach if they wish to take an intermediate or an advanced level examination in a subject. With this the Regulation of the school leaving examination has become a document of content regulation – like the National Core Curriculum for the first ten years of schooling – for the completion cycle of secondary education.

According to the new examination regulation the *written examination* consists of completing centrally issued (standardised) test sheets. The test sheets are marked by the subject teachers with the help of keys provided centrally. The Minister of Education may rule that the test sheets of certain examination subjects from certain types of schools, from given towns or regions, or even from the whole country, be marked at the future national school leaving examination centres. The theses of the *oral examination* are prepared by the subject teacher in the case of an intermediate level examination and by the national school leaving examination centre in case of an advanced exam. The oral examination is open to the public but the president of the examination committee may limit this. In a *practical examination* the rules of the written examination apply if the solution of the examination assignment happens in a recorded form (e.g. a drawing, writing out in a score, an industrial design, a computer programme). And the rules of the oral examination apply if the assignment has to be shown or performed on one occasion (singing, a gymnastic exercise, etc.) A student reaches the attainment targets of the school leaving examination if he/she obtains a minimum of mark 2 (sufficient or pass) in each part of each examination subject.

3. Textbooks, teaching aids

It is well-known that the contents of school education are mostly governed by the textbooks and teaching aids used in schools. Textbooks will remain among the most important tools that determine educational contents in the implementation phase of the National Core Curriculum in the second half of the 1990s even though their

importance seems to be on the wane as compared to the other tools of educational contents regulation.

The textbook market: supply, demand and market actors

After the state monopoly of textbook publication was abolished and the state was no longer compelled to provide the schools with textbooks market-based textbook publication and sales developed within a fairly short time in the first half of the 1990s. The 1993 Act on Public Education made it the teachers' right to choose the textbooks, teaching aids and equipment to be used in their teaching. The fast growth of the demand was also fed by the practice that a significant proportion of teachers liked to try several new publications in their subjects. In the first half of the decade there were a lot of schools where there were 3 or 4 textbooks used in parallel in one class, sometimes ones following different pedagogical models. By the middle of the decade the teachers' right to choose, which had a great impact on the demand, was re-regulated. The 1996 Amendment of the Act ruled that the teachers could choose a textbook in accordance with the local curriculum of their school and after consulting their colleagues in the department. The ruling that the teaching staff has to make decisions about the textbooks and teaching aids used in the school during the adoption process of the pedagogical programme also calls for reaching a professional agreement among the staff.

A large number of public educational institutions have renewed their textbooks in the past few years. According to the 1997 NCC survey in average 52% of the general knowledge textbooks and 64% of the foreign language textbooks had been replaced by new ones in the schools. The 1200 school heads asked predicted that a further 42% of the general knowledge textbooks and some 30% of the foreign language textbooks were going to be replaced in the coming two-three years.

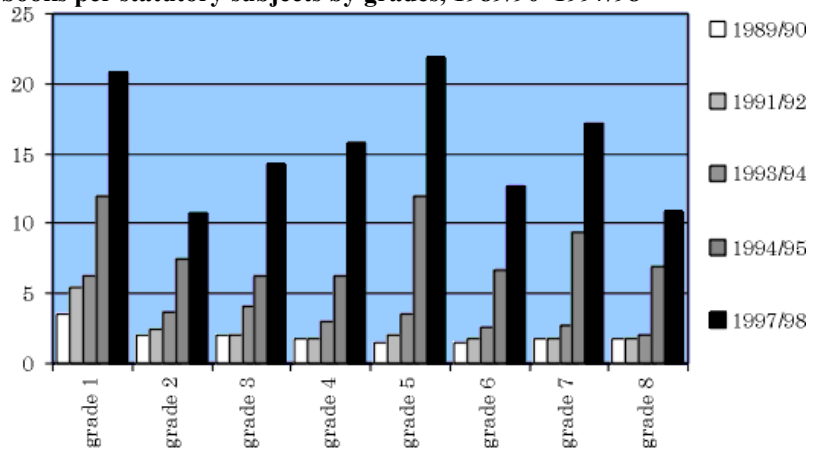
The development of the textbook market supply can be estimated on the basis of the textbook register issued yearly by the Textbooks and Teaching Aids Office of the Ministry of Education.

The increase of the number of textbooks registered annually shows that the growth of the supply continued dynamically through the middle of the decade. There were 2480 approved titles registered for the school year of 1997/98, which meant that

the general schools could select from 28% more general knowledge textbooks and 74% more foreign language textbooks than a year before. The number of religious textbooks published by the churches rose significantly, too, with the Calvinist Church being particularly active in this field. The growth of supply was most dynamic in the publishing of foreign language textbooks and teaching aids.

The richness of the choice and the long route taken from the "one-textbook world" to a supply market are best illustrated by the number of textbooks per individual subjects. The choice – reflecting the beginning of the pedagogical cycles and the transformation of the school structure – is widest in grades 1, 5 and 7. But there are a lot of textbooks to choose from, various textbooks that convey roughly the same cultural contents, at the other grades as well, which are a bit less favoured by textbook developers. (*See Figure 2*.) The enrichment of the textbook supply is to be thanked for the professional workshops, most of which operate at, or co-operate with, developmental schools.

Figure 2
Number of textbooks per statutory subjects by grades, 1989/90–1997/98



Source: Vágó, 1997c.

It is important to point out that textbook provision in vocational education follows a completely different mechanism from that of general education. While general education is characterised by market-governed publication and distribution in vocational education it is the various sectoral ministries that are responsible for the provision of non-general knowledge, vocational textbooks. The Ministry of Labour used to be responsible for the provision of some 70% of the vocational textbooks. Due to the wide range of vocations (after the 1996 modification of the National Training

Register there were 933 recognised vocations) the institutions of vocational education use a growing number of textbooks year after year. There were 3093 kinds of vocational textbooks in use in 1997. The number of copies of these textbooks is rather small so their production is extremely costly.

The most important means of the state control and of the professional orientation of the textbook market is the regulatory right of the Minister of Education, as is laid down in the Public Education Act. According to the Act it is the responsibility of the Minister to regulate the order of textbook approval, the preparation and publication of the textbook register, the removal of textbooks from the register and the order of supporting textbook publication. The Act determines the contents requirements and the technical conditions of approving of a textbook, and makes it the right of the *National Educational Policy Council (OKNT)* to recommend the adoption of a book into the textbook register. This task is carried out within the OKNT by a professional committee which comprises of members of the OKNT and of external experts appointed by the body.

The official textbook register is one of the most important means of regulating the textbook market despite the fact that following register is not compulsory. Teachers are free to use any publication that is not listed in the register yet experiences have shown that the textbook register is of determining importance for all actors of the textbook market. The Ministry of Education partly functions as an authority in this respect because it approves the textbooks. But it is also a provider of certain services: a package is mailed by the Ministry to every school at the beginning of the calendar years which contains the textbook register appropriate for the level of school, the list of foreign language textbooks, the list of teaching aids available, the address lists of textbook publishers and sales agents, the advertising materials of the publishers and their order forms. The mediating role of the state ends at this point, and the schools send their orders directly to the publishers.

For the school year of 1997/98 134 publishers had some 2700 titles on the Ministry's register, which indicates that the number of publishers dealing with textbooks has doubled since 1995. In that school year there were 30 textbook development workshops listed in the register which did not have an approved textbook the year before.

Textbook prices and textbook financing

Between 1996 and 1997 the average price of textbooks rose by 22%, which roughly equalled the annual rate of inflation. Textbooks for the general school tend to be significantly cheaper (by almost 27%) than the textbooks prepared and registered for the secondary schools, and the price rise of the former is usually lower (17%) than that of the secondary textbooks (25%). The foreign language textbooks continue to be the most expensive.

The price of the textbooks are partly covered by the central budget, partly by the parents. The proportion of the grants earmarked for textbook support within the central budget (1.3 HUF in 1997) tends to decrease as compared to the contribution by the families. The universal per capita textbook support of 1994 (when it was 860 HUF per pupil irrespective of the school type) became differentiated in 1997. In the secondary schools it decreased in real value (1140 HUF), in the general schools it decreased in nominal value as well (760 HUF). As a result the contribution of the families had to increase: while in 1994 the proportion paid by the families was around 60%, by 1997 this rate rose to around 80%. The layer of parents who can pay seem to have accepted the situation that they have to cover a growing proportion of the price of their children's textbooks. But at the local governmental level we can witness that one form of social welfare support for the poorest families is characteristically the purchase of textbooks and exercise books for the children, besides covering the costs of their daily meals. In the light of this it is a rather controversial practice that schools consider textbook selection an exclusively professional task and do not usually involve the actual financiers, the parents, into the decision-making.

Since 1993, the publishers of registered textbooks have enjoyed a state guarantee for their short term loans in proportion with the number of textbook orders they receive. This regulation has enabled publishers professionally successful (registered) but in need of capital to enter the textbook market by bridging the period between the placement of the orders (1 January) and payments for the textbooks (1 October) and has thus helped the strengthening of the smaller publishers that specialise in textbooks. The viability of the financial construction is proved by the fact that until 1996 there was only one publisher that could not pay off its textbook loan.

The task of acquainting teachers with the ever growing textbook supply was allocated to the county pedagogical institutes by the 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act. Professional organisations also play an important role in textbook marketing. One of these organisations is TANOSZ, the *National Alliance of Textbook Publishers,* which regularly organises textbook exhibitions, textbook shows with demonstrations and professional seminars. But the pedagogical periodicals still fail to publish good quality and regular textbook reviews. The Soros Foundation sponsors the publication of *Tandem*, a periodical of textbook criticism, but this publication does not yet have a good circulation and is mostly not known by the users of schools.

Teaching aids

According to the 1997 NCC survey the schools are well-equipped with those aids that were considered most modern at the introduction of the 1978 central curriculum (overhead projectors, slide projectors, colour televisions). But there are shortages in the currently up-to-date tools of the information technologies and in the teaching aids that can assist in conveying the educational contents required by the National Core Curriculum. However, the secondary schools, as was mentioned before, are fairly well equipped with the up-to-date tools of informatics.

Up till recently the model of being provided with the appropriate teaching aids meant a nationally unified curriculum, a uniform use of teaching aids, and centrally-financed development and provision. The latest teaching aids register listed the necessary and the accepted aids but also laid down the normatives, i.e. how many of what aid per school, per class or pupil had to be available. The central budget used to guarantee that all schools were uniformly provided with these aids. This system collapsed at the beginning of the 1990s. And while the curriculum and textbook market reflecting the new contents regulations seems to grow stronger the launching of the market of teaching aids is lagging behind and looks like a long-term task. Domestic producers are scared away by the size of capital needed, which is inproportionately larger than the capital investment required in textbook publishing, and foreign producers are not much attracted by the small-scale Hungarian market. The role of the state in this respect, and the ensuing consequences for the central budget, have not been formulated yet except perhaps for the development in the field of information technologies.

The 1996 Amendment of the Public Education Act made it the responsibility of the Minister of Education to publish the *teaching aids register*, the items of which should be possessed by each school. After lengthy professional debates a new teaching aids list was drawn up in 1997 which is better adjusted to the demands of a framework-type curriculum regulation. The list contains the widest circle of aids that ensure that pupils can reach the attainment targets of the curriculum. This so-called functional teaching aids register does not actually list concrete teaching aids but rather the educational tasks the fulfilment of which requires certain aids or tools. A given educational function cannot only be served by one concrete aid, since there might be several suitable ones. Some of the aids are cheaper or simpler, others are more durable or more pleasing to look at, etc., so the autonomous schools and teachers will be able to choose from them according to their needs or means. Expert opinions say that the functional teaching aids register will first of all inform the producers and sales agents about the expected demands of the following years and will guide them in deciding where to concentrate their developments.

The new teaching aids register was opened to comments and criticism in spring 1997 for the professional organisations of teachers, for the organisations of parents and students, for the alliances of the local governments, and the organisations of the teaching aids producers and marketers. Considering the novelty of the document it is not surprising that some of those affected received this teaching aids list of a completely new character with reservations. The doubtful saw the functional list as too abstract and unsuitable for the launching of the development and they feared it would not be able to fulfil its regulatory functions. Those with a positive opinion argued that a different list would be hard to imagine amidst the current conditions of school autonomy and loose central regulation of educational contents.

4. Pupil attainment

How to evaluate the effectiveness of education has become the major concern of education in Hungary in the past few years. We have to know that effectiveness is an extremely complex concept and there are a variety of ways to measure it. The effectiveness of education is most often monitored by measuring *educational achievement*. Control itself has a variety of forms: measuring with standardised tests,

competitions, students olympics, monitoring the rates that indicate how many students of the secondary schools are admitted to higher education, etc. But schools also fulfil a large number of tasks the effectiveness of which is hard to measure exactly, such as the integration of disadvantaged social groups, the education of citizens and communities for life etc. In the sections below we are going to describe the effectiveness of Hungarian schools basically with the help of the measurement of educational achievements through standardised tests.

The measuring of educational achievements and their change in time

The measuring of educational achievements in subjects with the aid of standardised tests have been carried out in Hungary since the 1970s. The first measurements were carried out under the aegis of an international organisation, the IEA[4], but since the middle of the 1980s there have been regular measurements carried out with measurement tools developed in Hungary and to serve domestic purposes. The first such measurement, generally called the *Monitor survey*, was carried out in 1986. There were four consecutive occasions, in 1991, 1993, 1995 and 1997, when data collection took place[5]. On every occasion the sample comprised of 150 general and secondary schools in local governmental maintenance, where a randomly chosen student group filled in the tests in every grade. It is important to stress that there are no measurements that extend to *all* schools and *all* pupils in Hungary. Since the measurement of educational achievements with standardised tests and with samples of pupils and schools are based on very complex methodological solutions the generalisations of these measurements findings for the whole of public education have to be treated extremely carefully, with strict respect to the norms of scientific research. These reservations are recommended to be born in mind when the findings of the Monitor surveys are considered below.

The change in educational achievements over time can be illustrated in the most reliable way by the rates of achievement of the so-called *bridge tasks* of the Monitor surveys. These are unchanged tasks that have to be solved by pupils during two consecutive surveys. The *average rate of pupils solving* the bridge tasks *successfully* decreased heavily between 1991 and 1995, especially in reading comprehension. The tendency of deteriorating achievements was broken between 1995 and 1997. The rate of those solving the tasks successfully, again especially in reading comprehension,

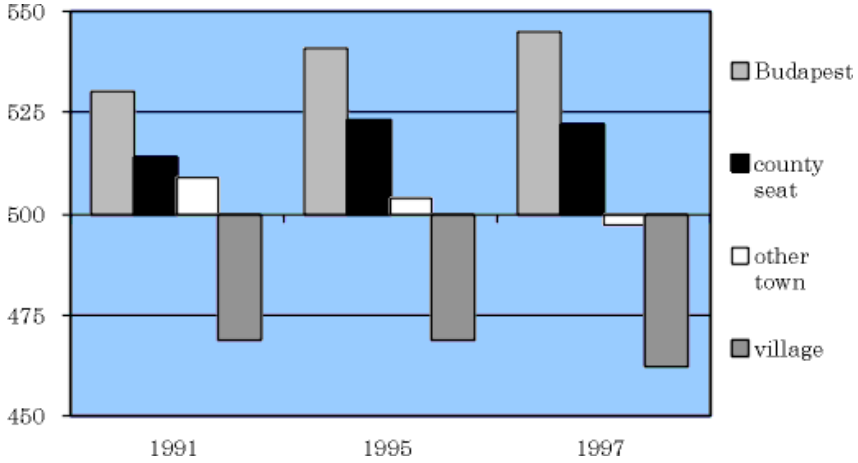
increased a little. But in the case of certain pupil populations the achievements in mathematics declined.

Besides reading and mathematics the 1995 and 1997 Monitor surveys also examined pupil knowledge in the fields of informatics and natural sciences. The findings in natural sciences showed a rather mixed picture: 4th graders achieved much worse and 8th graders achieved much better in 1997 than in 1995. There was hardly any difference between the results of the 10th graders in 1997 and their results of two years before. The picture was varied in the field of informatics as well. The achievement of the 8th graders improved considerably, that of 10th graders diminished dramatically, and there was hardly any change during the two years in the achievement of 12th graders. This may lead to drawing the conclusion that the increased interests that used to characterise the 16-year-old age cohort appear at an earlier age today and by the time pupils reach grade 10 these interests decline.

Differences between cities, towns and villages

Educational achievements show a strong correlation with the schools' site of operation. The lower we descend in the size of settlements the lower is the educational attainment produced by the schools. What is even more worrying is that *the differences* that have always existed *between the various settlement types* have widened gradually for the past few years. This can be exemplified by the period between 1995 and 1997. The opening of the gap between the various settlement types is extremely strong in the case of 8th graders and with respect to achievements in reading (*see Figure 3*). This also means that the statement we made above about the halt or slowing down in the deterioration of educational achievements is only valid for the capital: there is stagnation or a little decrease in county seats, but in smaller towns and especially in villages the educational achievements have actually strongly deteriorated. Similar correlation has been found in natural sciences and informatics and, what is more, even in cognitive tests. If we make an overall comparison of the achievements of 4th, 6th, and 8th graders we can see – besides finding that the ranking mentioned above is confirmed by every test – that the differences are growing, i.e. from the two determining factors, school and settlement type, the latter is proved to be the stronger.

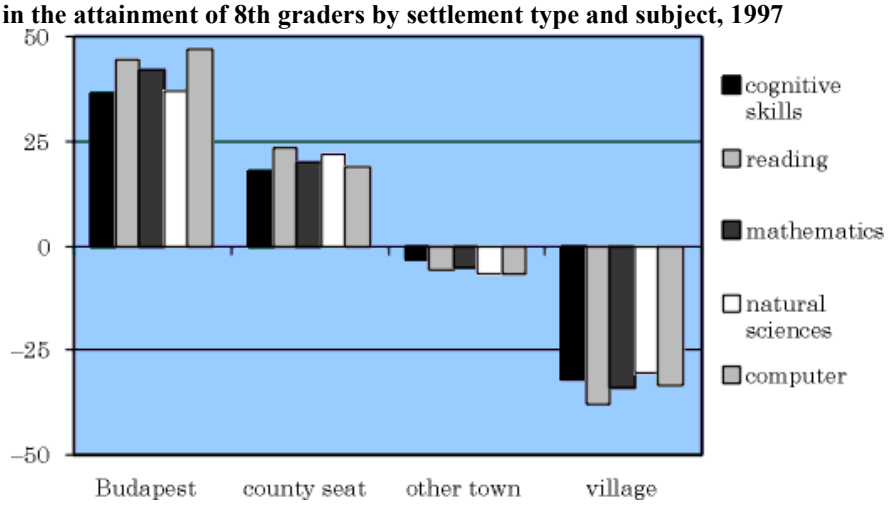
Figure 3
8th graders' achievement in reading, measured in standardised scores, by settlement category, 1991, 1995, 1997



Source: Vári, 1997.

By surveying and comparing the individual knowledge areas – though roughly the same correlation prevails – we can formulate a more differentiated picture about the differences between the settlement types. For example in grade 4 the gap is smallest in natural sciences and biggest in reading comprehension. In grade 6 the advantage of Budapest pupils is smallest in natural sciences: it is the village pupils who achieve relatively better in this field. In grade 8 the biggest gap can be found in reading, the smallest in natural sciences (*see Figure 4*). The gap between the settlement types is generally wide but its width is not the same in every knowledge area. Besides the lagging behind of village pupils there is another interesting finding to point out. The achievement of pupils at county seats remains much less below that of the pupils in Budapest than the achievement of pupils in other towns. This is especially the case in grade 8, which exemplifies that the chances for further studies are strongly determined by the place of residence. While in the capital or at county seats (in cities) pupils can continue their education without leaving their homes, that is they have hardly any new costs to bear when they choose from several secondary general or vocational schools, these possibilities are much more limited in other towns. So further studies mean a much weaker *motivation factor* – both probably for the pupils and the teachers – in smaller towns than at county seats.

Figure 4
Differences in the attainment of 8th graders by settlement type and subject, 1997

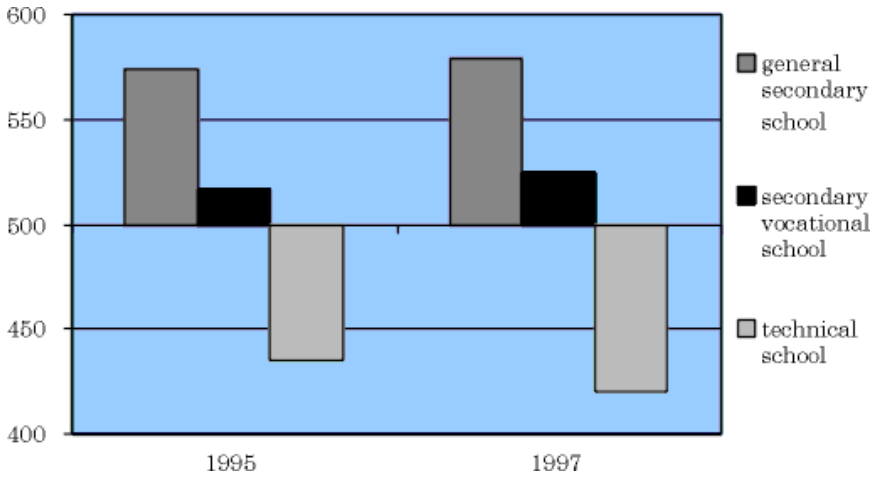


Source: Vári, 1997.

Differences between school types

An examination of the differences between the various school types is possible in the 10th and 12th grade students (who attend secondary schools). The differences in the achievements of 10th graders attending different school types are not only large but have also grown in the past two years (*see Figure 5*). Listing the gymnasium, the secondary vocational school and the technical school in this order continues to express the ranking of these schools with respect to the achievements of their students in every knowledge area as well. Students of the secondary vocational schools are closer to the gymnasium students than to technical school students. In standard scores the difference between gymnasium students and secondary vocational school students is usually 40 points, while the difference between secondary vocational school students and technical school students is usually 90-100 points. Behind the average scores of the school types there is, of course, a wide variation. One of the characteristics of Hungarian public education – striking even by international comparison – is that the differences are very big between institutions belonging to the same category. This statement is valid for all school types but especially for gymnasia. The Monitor surveys have confirmed that the term gymnasium refers to very different institutions in Hungary.

Figure 5
10th graders' achievement in reading, measured in standardised scores, by school type, 1995 and 1997



Source: Vári, 1997.

Differences between the sexes

In the majority of cases boys' achievements surpass those of girls but not everywhere and not to the same extent. With 4 graders there is practically no difference between the achievement of boys and girls in reading comprehension: girls are better in comprehending stories, boys are better at explanatory texts, while there is no difference between their achievements at document type texts. The girls' achievement in this grade both in mathematical thinking and in natural science thinking is a little better than that of the boys. In grades 6 and 8 the achievement of girls in reading and text comprehension is definitely better than that of the boys. In mathematics and science the same tendency prevails as in grade 4: girls continue to be at an advantage. But by grade 8 the tendency gets reversed: boys become better achievers. So there is a kind of polarisation to be observed: the occasional differences between boys and girls at the initial phase become clearer by grade 8. In reading comprehension it is always the girls who are better but in every other area, including informatics, boys do better.

In grade 10 (secondary level) the advantage of girls in reading comprehension grows further: their average achievement reaches 61.2% as opposed to the 56.1% of the other sex. But here we have to take into account that there are traditionally more boys in technical schools and more girls in the gymnasia. In grade 12, where there are no technical school students, the overall achievements of the two sexes almost equal

each other: girls here are still better at stories while boys achieve better with the other two types of texts. In mathematics boys in grade 10 are a little better than girls but by grade 12 their advantage over girls becomes significant (59.7% for boys, 50.9% for girls). This is most certainly connected with the practice of a much bigger proportion of boys continuing their higher studies at institutions where mathematics skills play an important role (e.g. technical colleges and universities). In natural science test scores boys have a large advantage over girls already in grade 10, and this advantage grows by grade 12 (80.3% for boys, 71.8% for girls). This phenomenon can again be explained by the differences between boys and girls in choosing their higher education field. The boys' advantage in information science is fairly large over girls in every age group.

Chapter E
School personnel and the system of auxiliary educational services

1. School personnel

The *number of people employed in public education* in Hungary is very high by international comparison. According to the data of a 1995 survey the number of people employed in public education in Hungary amounted to 8.6% of the whole labour force while the respective OECD average was 5.4% (*Education at a Glance, 1997*)[1]. The high rate was partly due to the fairly large size of the teaching work force: 4.2% of the total labour force was employed in teaching in primary and secondary education in 1995. (Only Belgium showed a similarly high rate with its 4.1%.) The proportion is even more striking if we take all levels of schooling (together employing 5.7% of the total labour force while the average rate in the OECD countries is 3.9%). The widespread network of kindergartens can account for this (*see Chapter C: The education system, progress within the system).* However, the high rate is largely explained by the big number of the auxiliary employees in public education, whose percentage in the total work force of Hungary was 2.8% while only 1.7% in average in the OECD countries in 1995. Only Denmark had similarly favourable rates in the

statistics (2.8%) surpassed by the USA alone, a country well-known for the high number of auxiliary staff employed in education (4.0%).

In view of this data it is no wonder that the fiscal restrictions described in detail in Chapter B (*Educational policy, the administration and financing of education)* had a serious impact on the number of people employed in public education. The decrease in numbers affected the *auxiliary staff* more than the teachers. The total number of people employed in public education in 1996 decreased to 97.2% of the number of the previous year but this percentage actually conceals a small increase in professional staff (104%) and the drastic decrease in the number of other employees (86.6%) (*see Table 1*). These measures must have reduced the high rate of employment in public education that was indicated by the OECD data quoted above for the year before. For the interpretation of *Table 1* it is important to note that besides teachers people employed in public education form two major groups. One of them comprises professional staff usually with higher educational qualifications (speech-therapists, psychologists, specialised doctors, special educational assistants, librarian-teachers, kindergarten secretaries, free-time organisers, social workers, system programmers, laboratory technicians, administrative operators, officers of labour, personnel and educational matters, maintainer of musical instruments, swimming instructor), the other group of staff are usually employed for maintenance tasks (maintenance personnel, fire-tender, school-yard attendant, porter, etc.). The category of "other staff" in *Table 1* basically refers to the latter group.

Table 1
Number of people employed in public education, in 1991, 1995 and 1996

specialised tasks	1991.	1995.			1996.		
	total number of employees	total number of employees	number of auxiliary staff	number of professional staff	total number of employees	number of auxiliary staff	number of professional staff
kindergarten education	58 532	25 883	35 879	61 762	21 836	38 191	60 027
general school education	100 461	36 941	71 762	108 703	30 897	74 945	105 842
general secondary education	12 103	5 319	9 707	15 026	4 380	10 367	14 747

secondary vocational education	14 527	7 014	13 672	20 686	6 661	14 492	21 153
technical school education	14 512	7 026	10 475	17 501	6 011	10 010	16 021
trade school education	1 265	577	1 486	2 063	491	1 285	1 776
public education total	252 808	92 023	162 267	254 290	77 758	168 938	246 696

Source: Department of Public Educational Planning, Ministry of Education.

1.1. The employment, the stratification and the salaries of teachers

There have been significant changes implemented in teachers' employment and payment relations and conditions of service for the past decade, which have fundamentally restructured the labour relations formerly characteristic of the profession. Teachers used to be state employees who worked under strictly regulated conditions but in great security, but by the middle of the 1990s they had become *local public employees*, whose work became more and more determined by the special environment of their area and school. The framework of the teachers employment, payment, promotion and working conditions have been laid down in the 1990 Act on the Local Governments, the 1992 Act on Public Employees, the 1993 Public Education Act and its Amendment in 1996 and in the National Core Curriculum.

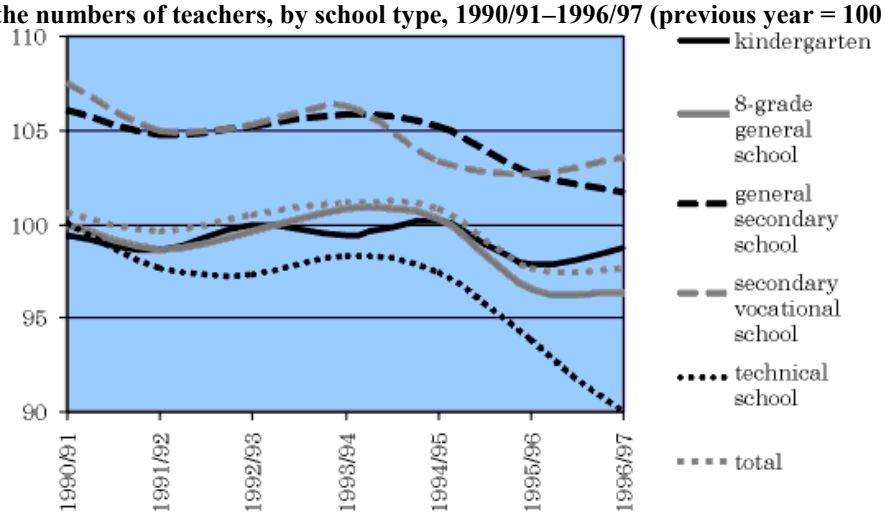
As a consequence of these regulations teachers today are public employees – with the exception of teachers in non-local governmental schools – and their employer is the head of the school. Teachers in private, foundational, denominational schools and kindergartens do not enjoy a public employee status but their conditions of service (due partly to the legal regulations and partly to the agreements between the state and the maintainers of these school) are roughly the same as those of their colleagues in public employment.

The decrease in pupil numbers in the 1990s was not followed by a decrease of teachers employed in schools until 1995 but then, as a consequence of the new economic policies, a decrease set in in the number of certain teacher groups. The processes of the first half of the decade can be explained by the needs arising from the educational expansion in Hungary, which kept the demand for teachers high despite

the diminishing pupil numbers. The reasons for the demands rising were: the abolition of the state monopoly on school maintenance, the striving of small villages and towns to open their own schools, changes in the school structure, and the expansion of secondary schooling. Nevertheless, there were governmental measures, too, which fuelled these demands, such as the adoption of the act on the legal status of public employees in 1992 (which increased teachers' job security), and the decrease in the compulsory number of lessons to be taught, which was the ruling of the then ministry.

As a result, the number of teachers employed in public education – after a short and slight decline at the beginning of the 1990s – grew further between 1993 and 1995. But after 1995 – due to the new governmental measures and to the decisions of the school maintainers and employers – the numbers started to decline. The decrease did not have the same rate in each school type: the strongest decrease took place in vocational and primary education while the number of teachers employed in secondary education continued to rise even in this period (*see Figure 1*).

Figure 1
Changes in the numbers of teachers, by school type, 1990/91–1996/97 (previous year = 100%)



Source: Department of Public Educational Planning, Ministry of Education.

Though it fluctuated from 1990 on, the number of kindergarten children did not change significantly. Yet the number of kindergarten teachers decreased by 5% within 6 years, which contributed to the increase in the kindergarten children per teacher ratio. The number of general school pupils decreased by 15% between 1990 and 1996 but the number of teachers in this school type only decreased by 8%. The

restructuring of secondary education is well illustrated by the statistics according to which the number of students in the technical schools for skilled workers declined by 36% within 6 years and the number of their teachers decreased by 24%. The 27% increase in the number of students in secondary education resulted in a 29% increase in the number of teachers employed in such schools.

A minority of teachers having left public education were dismissed from their schools. Some of them found employment elsewhere, others became unemployed. The rate of unemployed teachers among the total teaching force of 1997 was 3.2%, which was similar to the general unemployment rate of those with higher educational qualifications (3.4% in January and February 1997). The highest unemployment rate is among kindergarten teachers, which indicates that it is in this school type from which teachers are dismissed most and that they cannot find employment elsewhere.

In spring 1997 there was a survey carried out in schools where the largest numbers of teaching positions were disestablished in the school years of 1995/96 and 1996/97 (Liskó, 1997b). The reasons and the forms of these measures were analysed with the help of the answers given by the school heads. Class mergers and teacher dismissals happened mostly in the schools of smaller towns. School-mergers were carried out five times as often (20%) in smaller towns as in other larger towns and cities. In most places the decreasing of the teacher numbers was carried out painlessly, i.e. by granting early retirement. But in more than one-third of the schools surveyed there were teachers leaving voluntarily or being dismissed. While retirement or early retirement affected more than the average number of teachers in small school towns, there were more teachers in Budapest who were transferred to other schools or left voluntarily.

Stratification within the teaching profession

One of the main characteristics of the teaching profession in Hungary is the strong stratification of teachers along the lines of different school levels and school types. There are at least nine different categories of teachers in Hungary. The most numerous category is teachers with a general school teacher qualification (in 1996 28.3% of all teachers in Hungary belonged to this group). Members of the smallest group have the vocational qualification of a skilled worker (some 3% of the total teaching force). The majority of the teachers with a given educational qualification

work at the appropriate type of school but it is more and more common for teachers to work in schools other than would follow from their qualifications (*see Table 2*).

Table 2
Breakdown of full-time teachers in public education by level of educational qualification and school type, 1996/97

educational qualification	kindergarten	8-grade general school	special kindergartens and general schools	special trade schools	general secondary school	secondary vocational school	technical school	other	
kindergarten teacher	30 847								84
primary school teacher		36 212							21
lower secondary school teacher		40 469			1 287	1 835	1 954	263	80
upper secondary school teacher		5 614			11 674	8 498	1 403	112	30
vocational teacher							3 503	223	72
teacher of special education			4 062*						06
non-qualified teacher	834	605	265*		102				80
teachers with higher educational qualification but no teaching qualification		514			70	1 534	2 290**	320**	72

teachers with other qualifications, not fitting any of the categories above	210	244	2 190*				4 462	73	
total	31 891	83 658	6 028	489	13 133	16 329	9 223	941	69

Source: Department of Public Educational Planning, Ministry of Education.

* all institutions of special education together

** all teachers without an educational qualification

Like in all school systems there are differences to be observed between teachers working in different school types. A 1997 teacher survey has revealed, for example, that among general school teachers, obviously more of whom live in villages and are women, there are fewer teachers with higher qualifications, they tend to be less mobile and to earn less yet they usually live in bigger houses and most of them own a car (Nagy, 1997). The type of place where a teacher lives also adds to the factors of stratification, especially whether a teacher works in a town or in a village. (This factor is not fully independent of the school type either because the majority of the general schools operate in smaller settlements while there are hardly any villages that have a secondary school.) There are – proportionately – more trade union members among rural teachers than among teachers in Budapest, more rural teachers are religious and they are less active in professional developmental work, such as the preparation of local curricula.

Besides the work place and the qualifications possessed age plays an important role in the stratification of teachers. The sample of the teacher survey of 1997 (mentioned above) had an average age of 40.3 years. 14.7% of the sample were in their twenties, 32.7% in the thirties, 33.4% in their forties, 18.3% in their fifties, and 1% of the teachers were over 60 years of age. Hungarian teachers as a whole are much younger than their counterparts in the OECD countries, where 40% of the teachers were between 40 and 49 years old and only 11% of the teachers were under 30 in 1993 (Education at a Glance, 1996)[2]. From the countries of Central Europe we only have comparative data from the Czech Republic, where in 1994/95 15.4% of the

teachers were in their twenties, 30% in the thirties, 27.3% in their forties, 21.5% in their fifties, and 5.8% of the teachers were over 60 years of age, i.e. the age structure is very similar to that of Hungary.

The differences between the sexes show similar differences between the two regions of Europe. In Central Europe, and in Hungary, teaching is more of a female profession than in the economically more developed countries of the world (*see Table 3*).

Table 3
Percentage of women teachers in international comparison, 1994/95

	Czech republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia	OECD average**
kindergarten	93.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8-grade general school	75.7	83.7	85.3	90.3 (lower cycle) 76.5 (upper cycle)	64.7 (primary and lower secondary)
general secondary school	67.0	67.5	74.0	68.4	43.9 (upper secondary)
secondary vocational school	60.4	57.4*	64.5	49.1	
technical school	56.1		51.3	61.2	

Source: Education at a Glance, 1996; Major Trends, 1996.

* secondary vocational school and technical school together

** 1994

Income relations in the teaching profession

Besides the worsening of their labour market positions teachers for the past few years have had to face the relative deterioration of their *salaries*, too. The average basic salary of secondary teachers was slightly less than 39.000 HUF a month in 1996 and their actual earning was slightly more than 50.000 HUF on average. The average basic salary of general school teachers was just under 34.000 HUF, their actual earning was just over 42.000 HUF. The average variance of salaries was between 13 and 15 thousand HUF. The rate of other supplementary incomes, which come on top

of the basic salaries, (overtime pay, bonuses, etc.) was 15-16% in primary and secondary schools and 13% in kindergartens. While at the beginning of the decade the salary levels at the budgetary institutions lagged 10-15% behind the average salaries in the business sphere, (the difference between the business and the public sphere is similar in the developed Western countries) by today the difference has grown to 40% in Hungary (*see Table 4*).

Table 4
Incomes by public employment sector as percentages of incomes in the economic sphere, 1993–1996 (economic sphere = 100%)

	1993	1994	1995	1996
research, experimental development	73.1	85.9	84.4	65.0
public administration	75.9	81.9	85.6	66.7
education	58.1	61.3	59.6	47.0
health and social care	67.0	70.7	66.7	57.7
vocational teaching, cultural and sport activities	76.6	88.1	86.3	70.5
average income in these public sectors	67.9	71.5	71.2	58.1

Source: Szép, 1997.

All this means that even though teacher salaries have grown continually (growth has been 189.1% since 1990) the rate of growth remains much below the growth in the economic sphere (which has been 272.7% since 1990). The opening of gap in salary between the two spheres has become manifold compared to the beginning of the decade. A similar change characterises salaries in the white collar fields: the ranking of professions in this respect has not changed since the beginning of the decade but the extent of the differences has grown. Teacher salaries do not even reach half the salaries of the best paid professions. An internationally accepted indicator that measures the relative size of teacher salaries is the comparison of a teacher's yearly income with the per capita GDP. In public education the incomes of teachers in the OECD countries is usually 1-1.7 times the per capita GDP. Teacher salaries in Hungary do not even reach three-thirds of the per capita GDP. The indicator for secondary school teachers is 0.72, for general school teachers it is 0.68, and for kindergarten teachers it is 0.52.

Teachers' workload

After having shown the lag of Hungarian teacher salaries compared to the OECD countries we have to mention some indicators that are more favourable in Hungary: the teacher/pupil ratio (11.2 in primary education) and the number of compulsory lessons (20 per week for most teachers). Taking into account the stabilising tendency of the decline in pupil numbers and the low performance level of the country's economy, a significant increase in teacher salaries is hard to envisage these two indicators remaining unchanged. Other countries in the region can also be characterised by a rather low number of compulsory lessons and a favourable teacher/pupil ratio.

The vicious circle of the low salaries and/or the "over-employment" of teachers (stemming from the lower number of compulsory lessons and from the good teacher/pupil ratio) will probably be harder to break in Central Europe – where the memories of the employment model of the socialist period are still vivid – than in the richer Western countries. In Hungary, for example, rather than raising the salaries the policy of decreasing the compulsory lessons was often employed, which led to the regular practice of supplementing salaries with overtime pay.

At the level of the central budget, this resulted in savings since the pay for overtime per lesson remained low and not the whole teaching body received such supplements. This solution explains the strange phenomenon that while the number of compulsory lessons to be taught by Hungarian teachers was among the lowest by international comparison, 17 to 20% of all lessons were given during overtime in every school type in 1995.

Based on the 1997 teacher survey we can say that overtime is undoubtedly used to supplement salaries: 76% of teachers giving less then 20 lessons a week received pay for overtime in the month preceding the survey. (The rate of teachers with 20 lessons a week doing overtime is even higher: 82.2%, and 90.2% of teachers with more than 20 lessons also do overtime.) Our statement is proved by the finding that the quantity of overtime shows a correlation with the financial means of the individual school types. The most overtime pay was paid out in the institutions of vocational education (91.1% of their teachers received such pay), the least in the general schools (for 79.4% of the teachers).

Promotion in the teaching profession

The question of promotion is closely connected with teacher salaries. The introduction of compulsory in-service training and of professional examinations by the 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act has had a serious impact on this field. The new ruling that a teacher who has passed a professional examination has to be upgraded in the salary scale of public employees has introduced a new system of promotions for teachers. Time after time the idea has been voiced that an independent teacher salary scale should be worked out, which would allow the rewarding of quality work and extra performance, but it has not happened yet. With the professional examinations becoming compulsory this developing system of promotions can be expected to function as an "additional salary scale", where those taking examinations more frequently than prescribed will have better chances for promotion.

Nowadays there are few opportunities to "fast track" in the teaching career. The possibilities allowed by the salary scale of public employees (upgrading to a top salary band, which can be given for extra qualifications or an outstanding performance) were used by the employers for 32% of the teachers according to the teacher survey of 1997. Grading teachers in category "F"[3] is closely connected with the age of teachers (55.6% of the 50-59-year-old teachers and 42.7% of the 40-49-year-old teachers are in category "F" as opposed to the 3.9% of teachers in their twenties and 22.2% of teachers in their thirties). Category "F" is also connected with the qualifications of teachers (kindergarten and primary school teachers and people with no teaching qualifications are graded here in numbers much below the average), and it is also connected with the location (teachers in villages are much less often graded in this category than the average even though the formal criteria are met).

A way of promotion within the school is appointing a teacher head of department. According to the survey this happened with 16.9% of teachers and was connected with age as well: 23.7% of teachers in their fifties and 22.4% of teachers in their forties were heads of departments as opposed to the 13.5% of teachers in their thirties and 3.7% of teachers in their twenties. Becoming a school head – though it can be considered a kind of career defection – is a promotion opportunity as well. 7.8% of

the teachers asked thought that they might become a school head within five years. Considering this possibility is more characteristic of male than female teachers (11% of the male teachers thought so while only 7.1% of females) and shows a correlation with age as well. (11.8% of teachers in their forties and 9.1% of teachers in their fifties thought they might become a school head as opposed to the 7.1% of teachers in their thirties and 1.7% of teachers in their twenties.) This data show that these promotion possibilities do not significantly differ from the logic of the central salary scale: they are basically connected with age and reward the number of years spent in the profession.

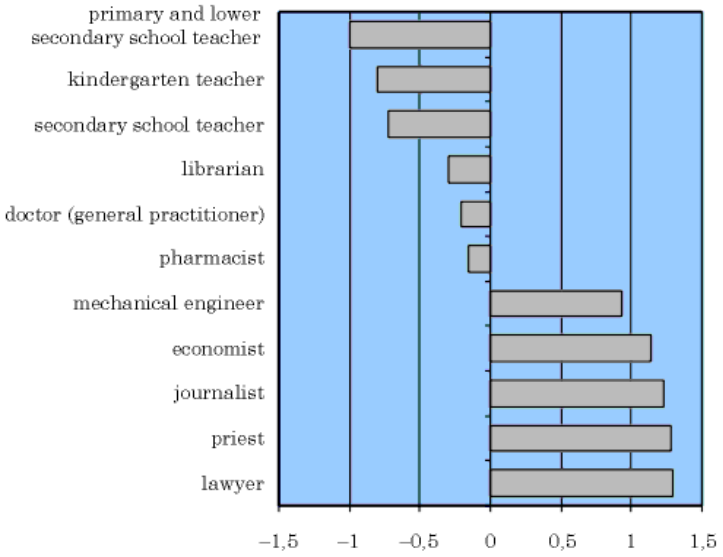
Working conditions and societal esteem

Salaries constitute only one factor among the working conditions of teachers, there are a variety of other factors influencing teachers' working conditions. Among them special attention has to be given to the changes taking place in the constitution of the student body. The demographic and social changes of the 1990s have had a great impact on pupils: today and in the foreseeable future it is not the same kind of children who go to school than in the past. We pointed it out earlier (*see Chapter A: The economic and social environment of education)* that the number of families that do not raise small children is growing, i.e. an ever growing proportion of pupils arrives from an ever narrowing societal sphere. There are twice as many families raising school-age children of Gypsy ethnicity than in the whole of the population, and this rate is growing. The number of big families with many children is also growing. The number of children coming from families with the lowest incomes is on the rise, too. So teachers for the past few years have had to face the fact that some of the children they teach are becoming poorer. These changes do not only affect the internal life of schools or the environment of teaching but also the working conditions of teachers.

It is an important condition of the teachers professional work how much the social environment esteems their work and whether teachers have the proper self-esteem. Prestige studies have shown that Hungarian society makes an articulate difference between the various groups of teachers but the teaching profession as a whole is given rather low esteem. It is also a finding that the gap between the financial rewards and the esteem of the profession is extremely wide. In a survey among the adult

population in December 1996 secondary school teachers came 6th, general school teachers came 7th, and kindergarten teachers came 10th out of 11 professions in a ranking of societal esteem. As far as the financial rewards are concerned teachers are in an even worse situation: secondary school teachers came 7th out of 11 professions. The gap between society's esteem and the financial rewards of the professions is biggest in the case of teachers: it is them who are perceived by the general public as being most underpaid (*see Figure 2*). Teachers themselves find their own profession of even a lower esteem than the whole population: they rank the profession of priests higher than the profession of secondary school teachers, which is of the highest esteem within the teaching profession.

Figure 2
Public opinion split on the societal esteem and financial rewards of various professions (differences in rank positions), 1996



Source: Marián, 1997a.

The questions asked: (1) “Please rank the following professions according to their esteem by society.” (2) “Now please rank these professions according to the income people can make by practising them”.

The teachers' vision of their future seems to be influenced by three determining factors: their gender, their age, and the extent to which they like their profession. (The latter shows a strong correlation with the gender of the given teacher: 90.5% of female teachers love their profession as compared to only 82.7% of the males.) While 73.4% of male teachers think that they will be teaching at their current school, 77.4% of females think so. Males and females differ in the way they envisage their future at their school: as we have seen, almost every tenth teacher thinks that they may become

a school head within five years. Among the youngest teachers the proportion of those who think they may become a school head is extremely low. Only 1% of the teachers are afraid of becoming unemployed (slightly more in Budapest and slightly less in the villages), and only 7.8% of teachers plan to abandon their teaching career. The life strategies of those considering leaving their current school show differences according to their gender: females would rather stay in education (they think of another school or another position within education) while the males in this group consider leaving the teaching career behind for good. The option of leaving the current school or the career behind fades – in direct proportion – with an advance in age.

It is well-known that the work of teachers is not limited to preparation and the delivery of lessons. According to the teacher survey quoted several times – besides teaching activities – 33.8% of teachers take part in the development of the local system of evaluation, and 33.1% take part in the preparation of the local curricula and pedagogical programme. 16.4% of teachers belong to a professional organisation, 14.6% of them give presentations on a regular basis, 7% of them work as educational consultants or experts, 6.9% publish their work, 4.3% are listed in the register of examiners, and 3.2% are listed in the experts register. Taking or not taking part in these professional activities is basically determined by the age of teachers. For example, 38.4% of the 40-49-year-old teachers and 37.4% of 50-59-year-old teachers participate in the preparation of the local curricula, while only 19.1% of teachers in their twenties do so.

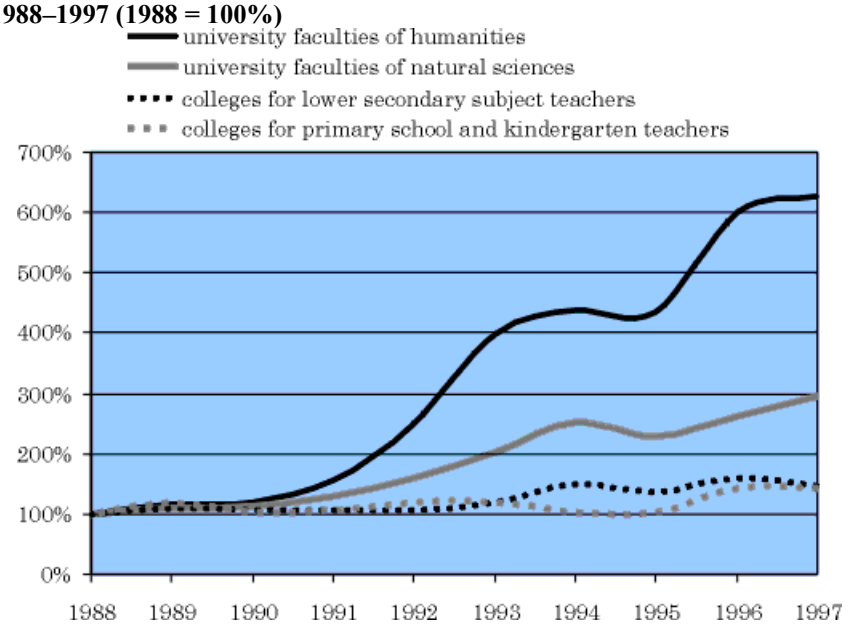
1.2. The initial and in-service training of teachers

Changes in teacher education

There are five major types of teacher education institutions in Hungary (college for pre-school teachers, college for primary school teachers, teacher education college for general school subject teachers, college of special education, and university faculties of humanities and natural sciences). However, vocational teachers are trained at a variety of other colleges and universities, too, and there are separate institutions to train the teachers of physical education. Out of the 90 higher educational institutions of Hungary 53 carry out some sort of teacher education.

There was a *strong increase* in enrolments in teacher education at the beginning of the 1990s but all in all it remained below the rate of the whole of higher education. After 1994, however, the expansion of teacher education slowed a little. It was probably in 1995 that students entering higher education could sense that public education could no longer offer job security and acceptable levels of income as it could before. Within the whole of teacher education expansion was stronger in the university sector than in the college sector. The latter even saw declining enrolments in some years (*see Figure 3*).

Figure 3
Changes in admission numbers in higher educational institutions where teacher education is also carried out, 1988–1997 (1988 = 100%)



Source: Neuwirth, 1997.

Besides full-time teacher education the proportion of part-time education (correspondence and evening courses) is significant, too. (According to a teacher survey of 1997, about one quarter of the teachers active today obtained their qualifications in part-time teacher education.) At the end of the 1980s almost half of all part-time students were in teacher education. It is a favourable development concerning the quality of training that this proportion shows a diminishing tendency, though in absolute numbers there are more part-time students nowadays than formerly.

There have been manifold reasons to account for the expansion of higher education – and within this in teacher education – since the change of the regime. Expansion is an expression of society's demands for higher education that used to be

artificially suppressed by the social and educational policies of the previous regime. Another driving force of the expansion is the wish to survive and expand on behalf of the training institutions themselves, which was further enhanced by the growing autonomy of the institutions. Another reason for expansion is the widening of educational choice. In teacher education, for example, there is training carried out in private institutions and the role of church-maintained institutions has also risen (there is Catholic and Protestant teacher education at the university level, Catholic general school subject teacher education at college level, and primary school teacher education both in Catholic and Protestant colleges).

Expansion is in an obvious contradiction with the narrowing possibilities of finding a job in teaching. Those involved in teacher education (lecturers and students) and the administrators of the national educational policy most probably sense this paradox. Yet, higher education, and especially teacher education, in Hungary is more and more seen as a means of addressing youth unemployment. However costly in the short run it may gain a return in the long run. (A similar phenomenon can be observed in the other Central European regions: despite the increasing difficulties of finding a teaching job the number of students in teacher education is growing.) Participation in teacher education may prove a worthwhile investment both for the students and for the state if the training institutions provide marketable knowledge which can be utilised outside the school system as well.

The whole of teacher education can be characterised by the phrase "trying to find its way". The past few years have seen so many changes that the situation is very difficult to review. This partly stems from the fragmentation of the field, from the great variety of institutional interests, and partly from the growing institutional autonomy and from the strategies of the institutions, which tend to compete rather than co-operate. The direction of the changes is determined by a large number of factors, such as the government-level guidelines and regulations issued, the domestic and international networking of the individual institutions and their capacity for financial manoeuvring, the restructuring of public education and a variety of other ad hoc factors. The following changes are worth highlighting.

There is a general attempt to raise *the length and level of training*. The teachers of all levels of schooling in Hungary are trained in higher education today. There is a

governmental plan to raise the length of teacher education to a unified five years. This can be carried out if the college level courses go through accreditation, if the colleges enter into integration with the universities, or if the higher educational institutions of a city or a region enter into associations/alliances. The 1993 Act on Public Education – in accordance with the structural changes of the education system – allowed the employment of primary teachers in grades 5 and 6 of the general school if they had undergone specific training. This development did not surprise the colleges of primary teacher education where there had been a possibility from 1976 on to supplement the basic training of primary school teachers with an additional course the completion of which entitled primary school teachers to do subject teaching in the transitional phase (grades 4 and 5) of the general school. In the case of certain courses (foreign language primary teacher, primary teacher of minority education, primary teacher-librarian, primary teacher-cultural organiser, primary teacher-social pedagogue, primary and pre-school teacher) it has been a practice for some time that the education of primary school teachers lasts 4 years. (Some one-third of the students in these colleges received four-year-long training at the middle of the 1990s.)

One of the most significant changes of the past few years has been the unified regulation of *qualification requirements* for teachers. After years of professional and political preparation the governmental decree that contained the qualification requirements valid for teaching in grades 5-12 (13) was issued in spring 1997[4]. According to the new regulations the minimum number of lessons to take in teacher education is 600, divided into three main sections: general pedagogy and theoretical psychology (minimum 330 lessons), methodology and subject methodology (minimum 120 lessons), and school-based teaching practice (minimum 150 lessons). The formulation of the qualification requirements can contribute to the strengthening of the professional character of the teaching vocation and, in the long run, can help the development of a credit system that would allow international comparison as well.

The *introduction of new specialisations or courses* highlights the current strategy of content modernisation. Between 1993 and 1996 the Ministry of Culture and Education received about a hundred applications with the request to found and launch a new specialisation, half of which came from the field of teacher education. These applications express the diversification of training and the development of new orientations that reflect the demands of society. Such specialisations or courses are:

talent developer, higher educational student counsellor, teacher of motion picture and media culture, pedagogue of health development and mental hygiene, teacher of social studies, career and learning counsellor, teacher of career orientation, and so on.

The development of teacher in-service training

The changes in the field of education have challenged the system of teacher in-service training (inset) most. As opposed to initial teacher education, which enjoys a high degree of autonomy, is more bound by traditions, and lasts longer, in-service training can respond faster to the changing expectations. This was why it is in this field that the educational governments have initiated the most institutional changes with the aim of improving the effectiveness of education. Also, attention has been directed to the need to retrain those already in service by the narrowing of the teaching labour market, and there have appeared a lot of interests in the possibilities of inset, on the part of the business sector (of foreign companies and institutions as well).

Before the change of the political regime teacher in-service training was basically carried out under the aegis of the county pedagogical institutes (*see below*) whose network has adjusted more easily to the new, service-type expectations since the political changes. The inset choice offered by the teacher education institutions has grown and new agents (professional organisations, foundations, private companies) have appeared with their offers in the market of inset. The churches have also started to take part in inset to train the teachers of their own institutions.

From the demand side, the expansion of this sphere is fuelled by the needs connected with the transformation of the public education system. New needs have arisen due to the tasks related to the implementation of the National Core Curriculum: local curricula and pedagogical programmes have to be developed, new subjects have been introduced. There is a general demand to revise methodologies, and teachers have to act out new roles. Furthermore, competencies are required from teachers that did not use to be known or demanded formerly: competencies and capacities of conflict resolution, effective communication, dealing more effectively with disadvantaged pupils, nurturing of talents, and there are new competencies required for curriculum development, examination expertise, institutional assessment or for the new tasks of school management.

Governmental policy at the middle of the decade considered teacher in-service training the most important means to revitalise the teaching profession and through this the means of modernising the whole of public education. This intention materialised in the decree that made professional examinations compulsory – a measure rather unusual in European practice –, and in the ruling of the Public Education Act that 3% of the total educational budget should be devoted to the preparation of teachers for professional examinations and to their re-training. It has been mentioned that compulsory in-service training is also a means of teachers' being promoted. One of the most developed fields of the implementation strategy of the National Core Curriculum in 1995 was also the system of teacher in-service training. One of the starting points of the strategy was that the central budgetary support should reach the users of the inset services in the shortest possible way, with the fewest number of mediators. As a result the grants meant for the support of in-service training were not given as earmarked grants to the organisers of courses but to the participating teachers and their schools.

The training provision responded fairly fast to the extraordinary growth of demand. In 1997 the Ministry of Culture and Education carried out a comprehensive survey of the organisations that planned to appear on the supply market and of the training programmes they were offering. Altogether 627 training sites were registered in 1997, more than half of which were higher educational institutions or their organisational units. The second biggest group of suppliers (91 training sites) consisted of economic organisations, mainly private companies operating on a market basis. Similar size groups were constituted by the pedagogical service institutions, by the public education institutions that volunteered for inset, and by the professional organisations. There was a smaller group of foundations. There were 4887 in-service training programmes offered for applicants by these training sites together.

As far as the content of the training provision is concerned, subject and methodology training forms are a decisive majority (over 90%). Some two-thirds of the courses offered by the trainers are shorter courses, between 30 and 60 hours long, but almost every tenth is longer than 360 hours. Less than 5% of the courses lead to a new basic degree or to a postgraduate degree. The majority of the courses aid in the acquisition of certificates which may only contribute to the professional examinations when the examinations themselves are accredited.

The courses organised and financed by the National Institute of Public Education (OKI) played an outstanding role during the course of 1996 in the preparation of teachers for the tasks connected with the implementation of the NCC. These programmes focused on the training of teachers and school heads who were to develop the local curricula and the pedagogical programmes and on the experts and maintainers involved in the adoption of these documents. The three-day long, small-group-based training courses of OKI on the development of the local curricula concentrated on the most practical elements of necessary knowledge and on the skills development of the participants. 730 teachers gained new competencies by participating in these courses. OKI also carried out the training of 2-3 *multiplicators* from each county on 4-day courses in order to ensure that there be trained experts in every county of the country who can assist schools in the solution of problems that might arise during the preparation of the local curricula. With the help of the multiplicators trained by OKI more than 10,000 teachers were able to become involved in the preparations for the introduction of the local curricula.

It is much more difficult to obtain data on the total numbers and the proportions of the participants of the courses. According to the 1997 teacher survey almost two-thirds (63.9%) of the teachers asked had taken part in in-service training in the previous five years, mostly (in more than half of the cases) twice or even more times. Participation in inset was higher than the average among general school teachers, among women, and among the middle generations (30-50-year-old teachers). Concerning the themes of the inset courses 22.7% were on individual subjects, 21.4% on pedagogical measurements, 16.9% on personality development, and 4.6% of those asked took part in school management training. One-third of the courses (34.3%) were shorter than 30 hours. Most courses were financed by the schools (34%), 8.5% of the teachers paid themselves, and about the same proportion of the courses were free. Satisfaction with the training programmes was surveyed with a five-point scale and the various courses received a fairly high grade, 4 on average. To the question whether they intended to take part in organised inset programmes in the future the majority of those asked (61.1%) answered with yes.

The fast expansion of in-service training raises a lot of questions, especially concerning the quality assurance and the financing of the programmes. In November 1995 the *National Office of In-service Training* was opened in Veszprém under the

aegis of the National Institute of Public Education (OKI) with the assistance of Austrian, German and Swiss experts. The tasks of this Office are to co-ordinate between the institutions carrying out inset, to motivate for and support inset, to operate the information system and the databank that contains the full supply of inset programmes, and to organise the exchange of domestic and international programmes. Following the 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act the *National Teacher In-Service Training Accreditation Committee* was set up within the National Public Educational Council to assure the quality of the programmes that appear on the training market. In the future only those training programmes that are accredited by the Committee will be allowed to contribute to the preparation for the professional examinations, and only the accredited programmes may be financed from the grants earmarked for in-service training.

As the decisions concerning the use of the grants earmarked for inset are to be made at the level of schools school heads and staffs have to face new challenges. Hitherto unknown possibilities open up for them because they can use the grants for the types of training their institution needs most. However, they also have to formulate a list of priorities which is not an easy task for a lot of schools. It is also a difficulty that decisions may have to be made without having enough information on the contents and the quality of the training programmes. Help in this respect may come from the information brochures that introduce the market of courses and that are partly accessible via modern electronic means.

2. Pedagogical services

Important roles are played in the system of public educational administration by the institutions of pedagogical-professional services. These institutions play a special role in carrying out the tasks of public educational assessment, the operation of the information system, and the facilitation of the process of contents modernisation. Pedagogical-professional services can be provided by any institution but the Public Education Act makes the provision of these services a compulsory task of the county

governments. As a consequence the pedagogical institutes maintained by the county governments carry a special weight in the provision of pedagogical services. Services are also provided by the national institutes of educational research and development, by smaller institutes operating in towns or in districts of the capital, and increasingly by private organisations.

The national institutes of educational research and development

The *Institute of Educational Research* (OI), the *National Institute of Public Education* (OKI), and the *National Service Office of Public Education* (OKSZI) are under the control of the Ministry of Education. The Institute of Educational Research (OI) carries out research in all fields of the education system including higher and vocational education. The National Institute of Public Education (OKI) concentrates on the tasks connected with the implementation of the National Core Curriculum, the development of the examination system, the in-service training of teachers, the assessment and measurement tasks of public education, and it also carries out research in the field of public education. The National Service Office of Public Education takes a direct part in the operation of the system of school leaving examinations, in the organisation of national study competitions, and in the organisation of other tasks concerning the teaching of individual subjects. The *National Institute of Vocational Education* (NSZI) is responsible for the maintenance of the National Training Register and for the developmental work connected with it, and it carries out research in the field of vocational education.

The county pedagogical institutes

The traditional institutional system of the pedagogical services that directly serve the work of schools is the system of the county (and Budapest) pedagogical institutes with units in the 19 counties and in the capital. At the beginning of the 1990s these institutes underwent a critical period both from organisational and from financial aspects. Due to the fiscal restrictions and to the uncertainties of the central administration concerning the role of these institutes the number of the personnel and the infrastructure was kept at a minimum in most counties. In the middle of the

decade their situation was stabilising but by that time huge differences had developed between the counties with respect to the conditions of professional development and access to information. In 1997 there was a pedagogical institute in 18 counties and in the capital. In one county the institute was reorganised in the form of an economic organisation to serve public purposes. The county pedagogical institutes – besides offering the traditional pedagogical services – may fulfil other tasks as well (e.g. career orientation and educational advisory services, cultural tasks, etc.). The institutes are financially supported by the central budget, by the local governmental budget, and have their own incomes. The proportion of their own incomes varies greatly from county to county: in 1996 it was between 7% and 40%.

A field of outstanding importance among the pedagogical professional services is *professional counselling*. In the 1980s the educational inspectorate was abolished, a unique measure in Europe, and its counselling role was allocated to the county pedagogical institutes. According to the Public Education Act, the main function of the professional counselling service is to disseminate the methods and methodologies of education. The ministerial decree[5] that further regulates the field lists the following tasks: assistance in the preparation of the regulatory documents of schools (pedagogical programmes, local curricula, rules of the school), assistance in pedagogical development, in the selection of textbooks and teaching aids, the assessment of these documents and activities, and professional counselling for individual teachers. Similarly to other services professional counselling operates according to the demands of the customers. There is no legal regulation in force to regulate the conditions of service provision, so the scope of the services, the number of experts employed, the conditions of operation and the fees charged depend on the decisions of the pedagogical institute running the service.

The other determining field of importance among the pedagogical professional services is teachers in-service training (*see above*). In 1996 there were 1649 inset programmes organised and facilitated by the 20 county (and Budapest) pedagogical institutes. 31% of these courses were longer than 30 hours. The county pedagogical institutes play an outstanding role among all inset providers of the country in the organisation of courses shorter than 30 hours, which can respond to the arising demands fast and in a flexible way. In 1996 the main aim of the in-service training programmes was to assist the implementation of the National Core Curriculum. 18 of

the 20 institutes have run school management training programmes, and the training programmes of personality development are becoming increasingly popular.

There are *regional and national seminars and conferences* organised by the county pedagogical institutes. All of them publish their own monthly *publications* (newsletters, information brochures, etc.), which have an important role in disseminating professional information. The newsletters inform the schools about professional programmes, study competitions and application possibilities and often have the pedagogical institute's monthly events calendar as a supplement. Eight of the pedagogical institutes publish their own pedagogical periodicals, most of which are published every half a year or a quarter but some are monthlies. They provide good publication opportunities for teachers involved in creative development. Brochures that serve the career orientation of pupils are published in 6 counties. Besides these regular publications, a large number of circulars, methodological recommendations, competition calendars and other printed materials are received by the schools and the teachers from the pedagogical institutes.

Except for one institute, all have their own specialised *pedagogical libraries*. 18 of the institutes have a separate *textbook showroom*. The tools of modern computer technology and telecommunications play an ever increasing role in the dissemination of information. The facilities and the activities of the county pedagogical institutes are important assets in the development of public educational informatics. In 1996 a public educational informatics office was opened in each of the county pedagogical institutes with the financial and professional help of the Ministry of Culture and Education, the Soros Foundation, and the National Institute of Public Education.

The number of various study *competitions* – at the county, regional and national levels – that serve the nurturing of talents has grown rapidly in the past few years. More and more *services* are *oriented towards the needs of the local governments*. The county pedagogical institutes are active in networking, which allows them to join in research and developmental activities and in programmes based on international cooperation.

Chapter F

The strengths and weaknesses of the system

The Hungarian education system is undergoing a large-scale transformation. The changes have brought about a lot of good and innovative developments but there are also a lot of problems to tackle. Sometimes there are both positive and negative aspects to the same change. In the following section we are going to overview some of the major changes from this viewpoint.

Perhaps the biggest strength of this system currently in transition is the change towards a decentralised system of administration or, in other words, a *system of shared responsibilities*. A great number of agents (educational policy-makers at the national, the regional and the local levels, officials, social organisations, experts, market actors, teachers, parents, pupils, and the media) take a smaller or greater responsibility for the reform of the Hungarian education system. This means that a lot of different interests are articulated and a lot of players have a stake in the operation of the system. There are inevitable negative tendencies in a period like this; for example, there are no guarantees that corruption or abuse may be prevented. Yet, these unwelcome phenomena can be more or less suppressed by the proper degree of transparency and by the articulated interests of the different groups involved. It is an invaluable asset that the system allows innovation and creativity to thrive, as well as the capacity to learn from others.

The Hungarian educational supply has been made *multi-coloured* by the decentralised administration and the multiplicity of interests. Teachers, schools and parents have a growing variety of curricular programmes, textbooks and teaching aids to select from. The possibility for new agents (professional organisations, market forces, experts from higher education and the social sciences) to take part in the development of this supply has resulted in a surplus of innovation that by far surpasses the possibilities afforded by the economic conditions of the country (and its public education system). Innovation helps mobilise new financial resources. Beyond the central and local public resources, many additional sources (private, economic and

foreign) have been drawn on in the financing of this educational modernisation through applications and cooperation.

It is probably due to the enrichment of educational choice that – according to various public opinion polls – parents in different areas and institutions are usually satisfied with the schooling of their children and the acceptance rates of schools among parents have risen in the past few years. Nevertheless, macro-level analyses often voice concerns about the realisation of the two basic values of education: *equity* and *quality*. As a consequence of the reform of the school structure and of content regulation, the system has not only become multi-coloured but also less transparent, making it much more difficult to judge and control the realisation of these two values. There are reasons for concern, for example, concerning the transferability of the system. The achievements and higher educational chances of students and student groups in different secondary schools, for example, have begun to show characteristic deviations. It is still hard to judge what role is played in these phenomena by social and economic transformation, by the different economic chances of the different settlements and regions, by individual choices, and by the conditions provided by public education. It can be generally stated that schools cannot compensate for the unfavourable effects of the social and economic processes of the past few years (such as the growing differences between the various strata of society concerning incomes and life chances). Bigger publicity and support can be expected to be given in the coming years to the programmes that may compensate for these disadvantages.

New solutions are required by the decentralisation of the education system also in the field of quality assurance in general. The Hungarian system in its current rapid transition does not yet have enough guarantees built in to ensure that schools (every school) follow curricular programmes and textbooks of a proper quality. Much of the responsibility for educational contents lies with market forces (the textbook and curricular supply) but the competition between them will bring about more even and better quality only in the long term. To enhance this process and to protect the interests of the young people in school today, the methods of quality assurance and of rewarding and supporting quality work (programme accreditation systems, forms of self-development for schools, etc.) are being rapidly developed.

The system of shared responsibilities can only function if the various sides involved strive for an attitude of *cooperation and consensus-seeking*. The developments of the past few years have brought forth examples both ofthese attitudes and their opposite. The various actors – sometimes voluntarily, sometimes due to the lack of expertise and political experience or to the incorrect estimation of their own abilities – are often driven by self-interest or miscalculate the consequences of their actions. But when the different parties recognise the potential of cooperation and the more rewarding effects of a common effort, they can create a wealth of innovation in this field (communication, forms of cooperation). For example, there have been a lot of cost-effective and quality-improving solutions developed in the field of small regional cooperation (sharing certain teachers, e.g. language teachers, who would have a low number of lessons in a small school, organising common in-service training programmes for the teachers of several small schools, etc.) Similar solutions can be seen in the organisational and developmental work of the professional organisations that extend to several areas or regions.

The system of shared responsibilities requires a mutual willingness to make concessions and to arrive at a common interpretation of concepts. *Co-ordination* is more difficult to create in such a system, the operation is characteristically based on the *principle of precedence*. The culture of the latter has developed greatly in the past few years, but a lot of elements are still underdeveloped or missing. There is still a lot of unevenness in a variety of fields, such as the flow of information, the development of forms of cooperation, a proper system of legal redress, the preparedness of the agents, the supporting mechanisms (e.g. appeasement, conflict resolution), and the acceptability of the system at its various levels, whatever its location.

Having access to the necessary *information* and ensuring its proper flow in a system that is highly decentralised and where there are large number of innovations being carried out at the same time is a huge problem. As we have seen, there are challenges to be faced in this field in Hungary. The inherited information system has difficulties in following school programmes that cut through the traditional institutional structures. The current statistical system (which builds on the different types of secondary schools) is unable to describe and reflect the actual richness of the educational work conducted in the institutions. Data collection so far has failed to keep up with the developments having recently taken place in the field of curricular

programmes. Statistical data collection and processing will obviously have to catch up with the changes stemming from the transformation of the system of educational administration.

It is also a challenge that the parties involved in the decision-making processes do not possess the same level of *professional expertise*. There are a lot of problems connected with the fragmentation of maintainer administration: due to the large numbers and the small sizes of the local governments it is difficult, or even impossible, to develop the professional expertise needed for the local administration of public education. The professional development and continuous training of local governmental officials (and politicians) who are responsible for public education is an arduous task. Among the conditions of shared responsibilities, this task will probably require more intense cooperation between the ministries that are responsible for education and for the operation of the local governments.

As we have seen there are a number of problems concerning the *efficiency* of the education system. In the financial administration of Hungarian public education, the decisions about the use of the resources are mostly made by local decision-makers. These decisions – made within the framework of the central documentation – are basically determined by the local interests and interest relations. Whether the use of the resources is efficient in Hungarian public education or not, basically depends on the quality of the local decisions. And the quality of these decisions varies greatly. A lot of questions have arisen recently concerning the administration of the workforce in public education. We have seen that though Hungarian teachers work under fairly favourable working conditions (the teacher/pupil ratio is low, and so is the number of compulsory lessons) they suffer from extremely unfavourable and still deteriorating pay conditions. Yet, this situation has not been brought about by positive decision-making. On the contrary, it is a result of not making decisions, or rather of neglecting problems.

One of the major dilemmas of the Hungarian education system today is that it has inherited an employment and pay structure where job security used to be a basic value and suppressed salaries used to be accepted. This legacy is less and less viable among the developing market relations. But the news about the dismissals and the re-training of teachers are often perceived by the general public as injuring the interests of the

education sector while it is also known that salaries cannot be kept at these low levels. Such discrepancies between expectations hinder the development of an efficient management of the labour force in education.

By turning teachers into local employees, the development of human resource management at the local level has become both possible and necessary. But the questions of the working conditions and the salaries of teachers do not usually come up in their full professional and financial complexity during the local budgetary debates, and alternatives are rarely elaborated clearly. Admistrators today have a basic interest in avoiding conflicts, which leads to little change in the given local relations. This statement can be exemplified by the results of the local x-raying processes that have revealed that administrators are willing to accept the splitting of study groups in exactly those schools where the number of pupils is decreasing. By splitting the groups, schools try to maintain the number of teachers, despite the decline in pupil numbers. Such solutions do not contribute to the improvement of either the efficiency or the quality of education, yet these requirements are not voiced (or not with the proper weight) by the local communities.

Finally it is important to stress that even though the development of the system of shared responsibilities in Hungarian public education is the result of a longer development, the process of transition is not, by far, over yet. Many elements of the system are still too novel for some, so they are unable as yet to gain the knowledge and the skills required by the responsibility they have to exercise, or they have not yet developed the new techniques of cooperation and control that are prerequisites of the successful operation of the system. The advancement of the current learning process – especially if it is aided by clear-sighted policies – may significantly improve the capacity of the system to realise the major objectives of public education.

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